

**HONG
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"The best news & reviews
this side of the Pacific"

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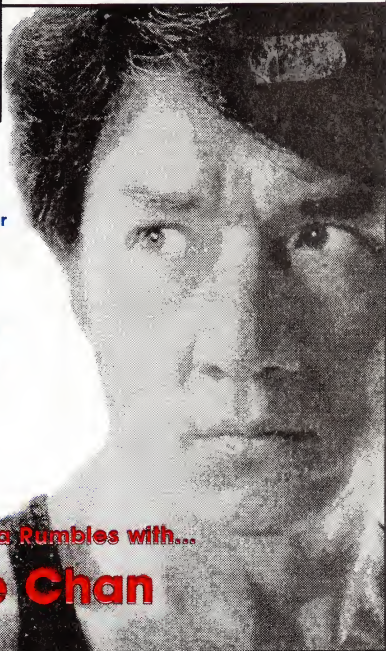
**The Return of Sammo Hung in
*Don't Give a Damn***

***Fist of Fury*: From One Lee to Another**

**Stephen Chiau: Crown Prince of HK
Comedies Part II**

Stanley Kwan's *Red Rose, White Rose*

Synch Sound in Hong Kong Cinema



New Line Cinema Rumbles with...

Jackie Chan



Anita Yuen and Leslie Cheung star in the all star Tsui Hark hit, *The Chinese Feast*



HKFC Exclusive:

**An
Interview
with
Michelle Yeoh**



My Father is a Hero becomes
Jet Lee's best movie ever!

Hong Kong Film Connection

"The Best News & Reviews this Side of the Pacific"

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**God of Gamblers' Returns Finishes
Number One for the Year (see page 5)**

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New Line Cinema's Interest in Jackie May be a Mixed Blessing

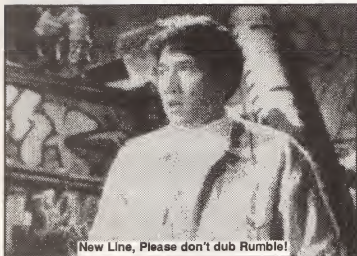
Rumble in the Bronx has grossed over \$40 million U.S. dollars internationally in less than a month. With figures like this, it was no surprise that the American market would turn it's demanding head once again on the world's most overlooked star, Jackie Chan. When the smoke cleared, New Line Cinema was left holding the bag paying an estimated \$300,000 plus percentage points for the Chan vehicle. Avid Hong Kong film fans have more or less panned *Rumble*, citing a lack of plot, but to American audiences the plotless action film is what movies are all about.

While New Line had its roots in horror and exploitation during the 1980's, the independent has recently become a powerhouse without Freddy. The company has also signed John Woo for projects and Ronny Yu for *The Slayer*. The problem with New Line is the fact that they are now thinking like a major, using more and more marketing schemes to wield their product for success. Losing the Howard Stern film (they wanted it to reach a wider audience with a PG-13!) is firm evidence, but now they're messing with Jackie.

With a small percentage of *Rumble* already in English, New Line is toying with the idea of dubbing the entire film for a wider audience. Remember the editorial on dubbing *Like Water, For Chocolate*? By dubbing *Rumble*, the negative perception of Chinese dubbed films may become reinforced once again. Hopefully, New Line will go out of its way to do a professional job this time. New Line must have big plans for *Rumble* since no talk has indicated that the film will be released by the company's subsidiary Fine Line, which handles foreign product.

New Line has also signed an agreement with Golden Harvest to acquire the rights for Chan's next three pictures as well. Two

of these films will be made this year, and they won't have the look of *Rumble*, which had a ridiculous seven month shooting schedule. New Line may be in for a surprise as far as the quality is concerned, and the content may have to be trimmed since these two films are not as Americanized as *Rumble*. I'm sure New Line isn't above shooting extra footage to feature more Caucasians (*Might Morphin Power Rangers* (Zyu Rangers) seemed to work!).



New Line, Please don't dub *Rumble*!

The up side to this whole matter is the fact that everyone will be able to see this film in one way or another. No longer will accessibility be a problem. The publicity that Chan has received in the past month or so (*Time* magazine, *Variety*) will finally live up to its name when everyone will get the chance to see Chan in action. Mainstream American audiences have only seen Chan in the *Cannonball Run* films, *The Big Brawl*, and *The Protector*, so *Rumble* will definitely be a surprise. Let's just hope that New Line doesn't butcher it.

For those of you wondering if you will be able to see this film the original way it was intended, your local Chinese video store will have it in some form or fashion. And Mei Ah will release *Rumble* on laserdisc in letterbox with subtitles. So, you may not be able to see it on the big screen (unless you live in New York, Los Angeles, Vancouver, or Hawaii), but every Hong Kong film fan will be able to find it on video in its entirety. If you want to see the Cantonese version and you don't want to wait for the actual release, the Malaysian bootlegs may be the answer. They have Malaysian subtitles, as well as English and Chinese, but at least the film is complete with synch sound Cantonese and English. New Line Cinema will release *Rumble* nationally late this year, most likely in the fall.

Walt Disney is also stepping up to the plate with their newly purchased company, Miramax, which has bought the rights to the Wong Kar-wai hit *Chung King Express*. You may have to wait awhile before you can catch this one on the big screen -- the film is part of a large acquisition and is tentatively set for a 1996 release. With two big Hong Kong movies on the way into the American market, only time will tell when these films will get the attention they deserve.

Latest Hong Kong Cinema News

Jet Lee is churning them out left and right, and 1995 is no exception. *My Father is a Hero* is making money feet over fist in Hong Kong, and Lee has already started on another film starring Jacky Cheung and Chingmy Yau. This modern day actioner has Lee playing a stunt double for Cheung, who is a movie star. Not much of a stretch for either actor, but with Wong Jing at the helm, this film will surely have a slick look. I hope that Corey Yuen Kwai has a hand in the choreography as he did in the last Lee/Wong film, *New Legend of Shaolin*. Wong Jing has been shooting every film from the past five all in synch sound -- does this mean we are finally going to see Jet Lee speaking Mandarin? I can't wait to find out! Later this year, Jet Lee and Jackie Chan will team up in what will make 1995 one of the best years for Chinese movies since 1992. Reports even speculate that Sammo Hung will join the cast as well. Hung has recently patched things up with Golden Harvest.

For those of you that can read Chinese, you will notice that Lee's Chinese characters as producer are different than those for actor. Apparently, Lee's actor characters were seen as a bad karma for him serving as producer, so he changed it to Lee Yeung Jung.

Yuen Woo-ping's latest film is *Tiger and Dragon*, which started shooting late last year. The film reportedly has lots of carefully-staged fight sequences in the span of a four month shooting schedule. Lesser known action star Ho Kar-king (*Thunder Run*) stars as the good guy while Ngai Sing is back at it again as the villain. Christy Chung, the hottest wall flower of late in male-centered flicks, plays the love interest.

Wong Kar-wai is turning out to be the most celebrated Hong Kong director in recent memory, and his next film, *Fallen Angels*, will be no exception. Set in the seventies, it stars Aaron Kwok, Charlie Young, Wu Sien-lien, Kaneshiro Takeshiro, and Leon Li. Shooting started in January and is tentatively set for a May release. Wong, however, is having financial troubles due to some Taiwanese investors who have put in money, and haven't seen anything in return. Lawyers have been pulled in on both sides.

Director Ronny Yu was said to have went stateside to pursue a career in Hollywood. Reportedly, Yu was to make a film called *The Slayer* with Mark Descalos of *Only the Strong*. Whether he actually made this film or not is a mystery, but Yu, nevertheless, is back in Hong Kong with *Singing in the Dark*, a warlord tragedy. The film has already started shooting and stars Leslie Cheung and Wu Sien-lien. This is a remake of a previous effort that was a musical. This could be another *Bride with White Hair* for Yu, but then again, money (budget) could be the issue.

Former idol David Chiang is back in the director chair after his last acting role in *What Price Survival*. He is making a new action drama starring Lau Ching-wan and Veronica Yip. Lau is also starring with Anita Yuen (no surprise here) in a new comedy from Lee Lik-chee tentatively called *King of Practical Jokes*.

Stephen Chiau's *Monkey King* adaptations (*A Chinese Odyssey Parts I and II*) have not done that well in Hong Kong, but then again, period piece films are old news. Chiau's next film is a sequel to *From Beijing With Love*.

Good news for fans of Tony Au, the art director who occasionally turns to the helm in such stylish gems as *Last Affair*, *I Am Sorry* and *Au Revoir, Mon Amour*. His new directorial outing will be a drama starring Tony leung Kar-fei and Rosamund Kwan.

Jackie Chan is doing a few small films for a while before embarking on the next half a year project. Currently, he is working with Anita Yuen on a race car movie entitled *Thunder Dragon*. The film is directed by Gordon Chan (*Fist of Legend, Long and Winding Road*) and also stars everyone's favorite ABC, Michael Wong. Filming for this new Jackie project began in February and it should wrap up shooting in June. Next issue, we'll have the scoop!

Recently, director Chiu Sung-kei had to change the ending of his *Oh, My Three Guys* because the producers did not think that Chinese audiences would tolerate seeing the male lead, Lau Ching-wan



Lau Ching-wan and Wu Si-nien star in *Oh, My Three Guys*.

reject the affections of female lead Wu Si-nien in order to fall into the arms of another man. So, in the producer-approved version, Lau Ching-wan gives up his gay lifestyle, changes his orientation and lives happily ever after with Wu Si-nien. While something like this is commonplace for America, it remains discouraging for Hong Kong film-making -- that's one compromise too many.

As you may have heard, John Woo has left the *Tears of the Sun* project for a new film entitled *Broken Arrow*. The action film stars John Travolta and Christian Slater, both of which have recently signed. Although Woo is only listed as producer on the new Chow Yun-fat project (*Peace Hotel*), he has stayed in very close contact with the director -- communicating extensively with him by phone and fax. Woo is also preparing a show for Fox slated for the fall season called *Once A Thief*. Although it would be easy to say that this is based on Woo's 1991 film, nothing has been confirmed as of yet. On the release of *Hard-Boiled* to Criterion laserdisc, Woo had a signing at a local laserdisc shop in California, which met with a large crowd that gathered over three hours before he showed up. Criterion is looking into releasing Woo's most coveted effort, *A Bullet in the Head* sometime in the future.

Lee Chi-ngai, director of *He's Too Heavy, He's My Father*, is back at the helm again with *Mack the Knife* starring Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Lau Ching-wan, and Christy Chung. Richard Ng makes a guest appearance. This drama should be coming to Hong Kong screens in March.

Hong Kong Cinema Teletype

Donnie Yen returns to the modern day action films with *High Voltage: Asian Cop* also starring Roy Chiao....After directing a made for video film called *Portrait of a Serial Rapist*, Danny Lee is back at it again with a new detective movie called *Twist* starring Simon Yam. Lee's protege, Fan Siu-wing (*Project S, Story of Ricky*) also stars....Yam stars as a good guy in a new action thriller titled *Man Wanted* starring Christy Chung and Yu Rong-guang.... Aside from the new Ringo Lam project, Andy Lau is making another action film called *The Flaming Wagon* (Translation)....Chingmy Yau stars with Simon Yam and Yu Rong-guang in a level III, period piece in the mold of *Sex & Zen*. It should be coming to Mandarin video stores soon....Chingmy Yau also stars with Veronica Yip in a hard hitting drama called *1941 Hong Kong on*

Fire....Kaneshiro Takeshiro has his hands full with a bunch of shaolin rascals in an action / comedy called *China Dragon*....For those of you that can gain access to Hong Kong television, you might want to check out *Legend of the Condor*, a series of *The Eagles Shooting Heroes* starring Damian Lau....What do explosions, crazy characters, fire, guns, and lots of color have in common? Why Clarence Ford of course. His latest entry into the action genre is definitely up there with *Black Panther Warriors*. It stars Simon Yam and Christy Chung (with short hair). This time out, Ford has made an action musical, but don't worry, there is plenty of Ford craziness going on here, like two people battling each other with fire logs on the top of a building. The review of this film will be featured in an upcoming issue with a newly refined Ford article and lots of new information and critiques of all of his films.



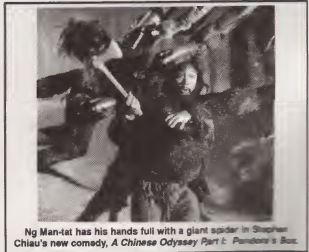
Chingmy Yau stars in *1941 Hong Kong on Fire*

Bits & Pieces

Folks in California recently got a surprise when the March 12th insert of the Los Angeles Times had a picture of Chow Yun-fat with the headline, "Hong Kong's Coolest Export." The article had several quotes from Chow apparently before *God of Gamblers' Returns* came out. Chow admitted he did not like the finished product, and the article portrayed Chow not as a star, but as a normal guy. No limos, as Chow drove himself and wife Jasmine to the premiere in a Toyota minivan. Chow makes fun of the skimpy Hong Kong filmmaking style with actors who play the same roles over and over and directors that let their assistants do most of the work. (Gee, it sounds like he's talking about American action films)....Chow is looking at nine different projects for his jump to the states -- one of which is *R.P.M.*, a high speed action-thriller concerning a car theft ring, directed by Quentin Tarantino pal Roger Avary. Chow says that if he comes to America, it won't be until 1997 rolls around....Chow also comments on Ringo Lam's belittling comments on the state of Hong Kong filmmaking although this could be due to the fact that his last film, *Burning Paradise*, was a major flop. This was a very intriguing article indeed, but anything on Hong Kong's most acclaimed actor is intriguing.

The New Yorker is doing a special on Hong Kong films with lots of interviews including Jackie Chan, Jet Lee, Michelle Yeoh, Tsui Hark, and Wong Kar-wai. This must-have for all fans will be out in a month or so.

-Clyde Gentry III and Sam Ho



Ng Man-tat has his hands full with a giant spider in Stephen Chiao's new comedy, *A Chinese Odyssey Part 3: Pandora's Box*.

The Year in Review

Overall, 1994 was not a good year in Hong Kong movies. With period piece films becoming less popular among locals, Hong Kong filmmakers were trying to come up with new genres to tap into, meeting with little success. Chinese New Year was the first sign that 1994 was not going to live up to the past.

Drunken Master II dazzled audiences, but *Treasure Hunt* and *Kung Fu Cult Master* failed to ignite any enthusiasm. Chow Yun-fat's return to the screen was ill noted, and it would be later in 1994 before he could shine with *God of Gamblers' Returns*. Although American influences are easily noticed in many Hong Kong productions, it's a *Wonderful Life* was a lackluster example copying the Pauly Shore snoozer *Son-in-Law*. This embarrassment proved to make some big dollars in Hong Kong, but to avid fans, it was discouraging. Stephen Chiu couldn't even save the day with his formulaic comedies *Hail the Judge* and *Love on Delivery*. The sad thing is that four of the highest grossing Hong Kong films for 1994 came from the lackluster Chinese New Year crop. From March to June, things didn't get any better.

Hong Kong Box Office 1994

Movie	BO US Dollars	BO HK Dollars
1. <i>God Of Gamblers 2*</i>	\$6,794,794	\$52,523,757
2. <i>Speed**</i>	\$5,917,686	\$45,743,712
3. <i>Drunken Master 2</i>	\$5,293,817	\$40,921,205
4. <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i>	\$4,828,723	\$37,326,028
5. <i>From Beijing with Love</i>	\$4,824,833	\$37,295,959
6. <i>Love on Delivery</i>	\$4,774,480	\$36,906,730
7. <i>True Lies</i>	\$4,763,036	\$36,818,268
8. <i>Treasure Hunt</i>	\$4,745,623	\$36,683,665
9. <i>Hail The Judge</i>	\$3,895,696	\$30,113,730
10. <i>He's a Woman...</i>	\$3,650,667	\$28,219,655

*=Includes 1995 **=Questionable numbers.

Most weeks on the charts: 15, *I Have a Date with Spring*

Jet Lee's *New Legend of Shaolin* was a minor positive, but offerings from Ching Siu-tung (*Wonder Seven*), Gordon Chan (*The Final Option*), and Stephen Shin (*The Great Conqueror's Concubine*) could not live up to their expectations. Ringo Lam's period piece *Burning Paradise* was one of the only high points in this four month slump, but the big budget action piece only made a measly \$1.8 million Hong Kong dollars. Comedies seemed to be the only saving grace with one actress to thank -- Anita Yuen.

Yuen made twelve films during 1994, and she led the way for comedies to become more than just Stephen Chiu films. While some of her films were quite painful (*Crossings*, *Wrath of Silence*), Yuen became the actress to watch. Now, after working with Jackie Chan, Yuen will hopefully stay at the top.

Things really started to pick up at the end of June with Kirk Wong's *Rock n' Roll Cop*. Not only did the film give diversity for kung fu actor Yu Rong Guang, but it really put Taiwanese actor Ng Hing-

kwok (Wu Xing-guo in pin yin) in the limelight. July's *What Price Survival* became a small gem mixing the seventies framework with the nineties style of swordplay films. July was the best month for Hong Kong movies in 1994 with the release of *Tian Di*, *He's a Woman*, *She's a Man*, *Chung King Express*, *The Returning*, and *Bodyguard from Beijing*. August was no exception.

Tsui Hark's *The Lovers* restored the faith in a masterful director who has a brilliance for lush photography. The film was well received by critics and fans alike, and it launched the careers of pop singers Nicky Wu and Charlie Yeung. Fong Ling-ching's allegorical comedy *The Private Eye Blues* proved to be a small success, as well as the directing debut of Veronica Chan with *A Taste of Killing and Romance*. Gordon Chan's *Long and Winding Road* and *To Live and Die in Tsimshatsui* added to the list made August a stable month.

September, October, and November showed signs of Hong Kong slipping back into trouble with the exception of two films, both released in September. Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* was a masterpiece of art, color, and music, which really made 1994 more memorable than it should have been. Stephen Chiu's *From Beijing with Love* was also a hit for audiences with its twisted form of humor. After a long dry spell of a few intermittent surprises, December exploded with energy leading into a great start for 1995.

God of Gamblers' Returns became the all-time box office champ in Hong Kong until Jackie Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx* unseated it just one month later. Stanley Kwan's return to filmmaking with *Red Rose*, *White Rose* met with lukewarm reviews in Hong Kong, but took top honors at the Taiwanese Film Awards. At the end of December, Yuen Woo-ping's speed it up / slow it down style of kung fu directing was put to the test with Jet Lee and *Fist of Legend*. One can always count on Yuen to deliver the goods.

Now, how is 1995 shaping up? I can honestly say that 1995 will best the past two years and it might even topple 1992 -- the year to remember because of the one two-punch of *Hard-Boiled* and *Once Upon a Time in China II*. Hong Kong is back to the glory days, no longer rethinking the period piece genre or trying to appease the masses. The industry is once again a machine with different cogs that have their own way of making things happen. And, the talent of the old days is back in fine form. Wong Kar-wai is not waiting years to make his next film. Sammo Hung has resigned with Golden Harvest to start making films again. Andy Chin is constantly hitting the mark with his carefully woven stories about women. Yuen Woo-ping is returning to the modern day action films on the *In the Line of Duty IV* level. Wong Jing is turning anything he touches into gold with his slick-looking budgets. And the Shaw Brothers are finally branching out from t.v. to once again grace the silver screen with comedies. Ronny Yu, Ringo Lam, Tsui Hark, Ann Hui -- the list just goes on and on with exciting new projects. And let's not forget the new faces.

Christy Chung made her debut in *Bride with White Hair II*, and she is showing up in every movie it seems. Famous Canto pingsinger Law Kar-ying is working with all the greats from Jackie Chan in *Crime Story* and Chow Yun-fat in *God of Gamblers' Returns* to Stephen Chiu in *From Beijing with Love* and *A Chinese Odyssey*. Charlie Yeung will give Anita Yuen a run for her money if she keeps finding the right projects, and the handsome Chun Sil-chun will be the leading man if he plays his cards right. Kung fu actor Ngai Sing is even making a comeback in the action films. For anyone that thinks that Hong Kong films are just a fad, you haven't seen anything yet! --Clyde Gentry III (additional research by David Zeve)

Hong Kong Film Award Nominations

Best Picture

Ashes of Time
Chung king Express
The Final Option
I Have a Date with Spring
He's a Woman, She's a Man



Leslie Cheung stars in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time*.

Best Director

Tsui Hark
 Wong Kar-wai
 Wong Kar-wai
 Chan Hoh-san
 Gordon Chan

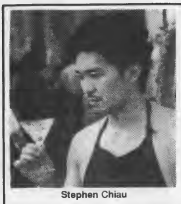
The Lovers
Chung king Express
Ashes of Time
He's a Woman, She's a Man
The Final Option

Best Actor

Tony Leung Chiu-wai
 Coll Man-fai
 Leslie Cheung
 Jacky Cheung
 Stephen Chiau
 Chow Yun-fat

Chung king Express
Three Loving Teenagers
He's a Woman, She's a Man
To Live and Die in Tsimshatsui
From Beijing with Love
Treasure Hunt

Stephen Chiau Sing Chi was born on June 22, 1962 in Hong Kong. After graduation in high school, he entered the actor training program of a television studio. Upon graduation in 1983, he was assigned to host a children's show for four years. He graduated to TV drama in 1987, gradually proving his acting ability. He made his film debut in 1988, when he was picked by director and actor Danny Lee to star in *Final Justice*, winning the Best Supporting Actor honor at the prestigious Golden Horse Awards. He then went on to make comedies, which made him a superstar. This is Chiau's first nomination for best actor. See the Stephen Chiau article for more information.



Stephen Chiau

Best Actress

Anita Yuen
 Joan Chen
 Lau Ar-lai
 Hui Fan
 Wu Si-en-lien
 Faye Wong

He's a Woman, She's a Man
Red Rose, White Rose
I Have a Date with Spring
Lifetimes
The Returning
Chung king Express

Best Supporting Actor

Law Kar-ying
 Chan Sil-chun
 Chan Sil-chun
 Coll Man-fai
 Chan Kwok-bong

From Beijing With Love
Twenty Something
He's a Woman, She's a Man
In Between
The Final Option

Best Supporting Actress

Law Koon-lan
 Fung Wai-hung
 Carrie Ng
 Sandra Ng
 Valerie Chow

I Have a Date with Spring
I Have a Date with Spring
The Lovers
The Returning
Chung king Express

Best Screenplay

To Kwok-wai
 Yuen Sai-sun
 Yuen Sai-sun
 Lee Chi-ngai

I Have a Date with Spring
Twenty Something
He's a Woman, She's a Man

Wong Kar-wai
 Wong Kar-wai

Ashes of Time
Chung king Express

Best Editing

Cheung Suk-ping
 Kwong Chi-leung
 Hai Kil-wai

Chung king Express

Tam Kar-Ming
 Hai-Kil-wai
 Lam On-Yee
 Cheung Yiu-chung
 Chan Kai-hup

Ashes of Time
The Rapist
Drunken Master II
The Final Option

HKFC Exclusive: An Interview with Michelle Yeoh

by Edward Summer

Born in Malaysia and University educated in England before she finally came to work in the Hong Kong film industry, Michelle Yeoh (aka Michelle Khan) speaks almost perfect American English with a spicy touch of a British Accent. During a 1994 three city tour (New York, Chicago, Washington, DC) on behalf of the city of Hong Kong, Michelle stopped at a New York City Cafe called Popover and chatted about her amazing career.

Edward Summer: What did you think you were going to do when you grew up?

Michelle Yeoh: I never thought I'd be an actress. At that time, if someone had said that to me, I would have laughed at them. As I was doing my degree, I was thinking of starting my own school for dancing and ballet in Malaysia.

ES: Did you ever play martial arts as a child?

MY: I was not allowed to because dancing and martial arts to any adult are so against each other: ballet is very graceful, lady like, soft and gentle.

ES: Was western dance part of your studies?

MY: I went through different styles: Twyla Tharp, Martha Graham, all the various dancers. At the beginning when I first went to England I was very ballet orientated. but later I switched to jazz and contemporary. I was very lucky because when I did jazz and contemporary dancing all the different contractions and things broke up the rigid ballet line for me. So you can imagine when I started to do martial arts, it was not difficult for me to adapt because my body had been slowly evolving and changing.

ES: Had you danced professionally?



MY: A little in England. The year I was to audition for dance companies, I hurt my back. That was the reason why I did a BA degree which went back to books rather than something physical. My doctor said I should never do anything physical again. If he ever saw any of my movies, he would probably freak.

ES: How about playing sports?

MY: Every single thing that you can dream of. Swimming, diving, table tennis, squash, athletics, I even played squash for the national team.

ES: You were Miss Malaysia for a year...

MY: It was a great experience. It wasn't something that I wanted to do. My mother roped me into doing it. One summer holiday she told me "By the way, we sent in your photographs for the Miss Malaysia Contest, and you've been asked to go for the semi-finalists." And I'm looking at her and saying "No way, Jose!" For two months every day she'd keep telling me it would be fun, so just to get her off my back, I said "OK. If I don't get into the semi-finals you're going to leave me in peace and I never want to hear this again." She had a point, though, it's something that you can only do at that stage in life. I was just 21. She said you're in the performing arts and it would be good experience. And it was! It puts you in a situation where you have to be meeting people constantly. In Malaysia it is very much being an ambassador of your country.

ES: How is it when you work with Jackie Chan?

MY: It's great, we have a good time together. He was the first person I ever worked with in Hong Kong in 1984, before I even got into the movies. I was invited to Hong Kong to do a commercial for D&B Films opposite Jackie. Straight after that I was signed on exclusively by the same company. It was in 1991 that we did our first movie together. Because I had retired for 3 1/2 years, it was comfortable working with someone I'd known for a long time. Jackie being such a hot shot action actor gave me the incentive to do a lot of things well. He was very supportive and encouraging.

ES: Your first movies are different from your later work.

MY: My first movie ever and only dramatic movie was *The Owl vs Bumbo*. That was with Sammo. *Easy Money* was a James Bond kind of action movie. It was because after *Magnificent Warriors*, the one we filmed in Taiwan, I was

badly hurt. I ruptured one of the veins in my leg. I cricked my neck, I had a semi-dislocated shoulder from *Royal Warriors*. The stunt coordinator wanted this guy to kick me so hard that I'd fall. It was a really nasty kick and I just landed the wrong way and knocked my shoulder out of the socket. We didn't sleep for 7 nights, we were filming continuously. I hadn't even gone home at all. Just to stay awake was hard. I was holding food and it fell out of my hand. I remember saying I am never going to do another action movie again! So that's why the next movie was *Easy Money*. It was to calm down. We were supposed to be in Taiwan for three weeks, but ended up there for three months. I only had one day that I didn't fight. And I was the only one who was fighting: fighting with the good guy, fighting with the bad guy. Every single time I appeared was to fight and that was it.

ES: Did you go and look for those parts or did people offer them to you?

MY: After Yes, Madam was such a success in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and the rest of Asia there was no turning back. If action

films worked, we didn't want kill the goose that lays the golden egg, so I went on to *Royal Warriors* and *Magnificent Warriors* and *Easy Money* and then I retired.

ES: One of the interesting things about your work is that even though these are action pictures, you still have lots of personality. Have you deliberately come up with a character that you're playing in those films?

MY: That was very important to me. I knew that what was selling the movies was the action, but I always try to keep in mind is that you can't sell JUST action, you need to develop it. Why I "feel" when this person is falling off the car is because I've grown attached to her character, I don't want her to be hurt, or I want her to beat the shit out of the other guy. It was important to me to have my audience identify with me.

ES: Who do you see that audience as being?

MY: At that time, to me, my Asian audience was very important. In the beginning our reach to the States or to Europe was still just the Chinese communities, the Chinatowns that mattered. It is only now that non-Chinese are part of the market.

ES: Was it regular people, working people?

MY: Oh, yeah! For the first couple of movies you're too busy to think about who is watching your movies. At that

time I spent 6 or 7 hours a day just trying to convince people that I was actually fighting. Anybody can pick up some thing and whack you across the head, but how do you convince the audience that it's real. You can get ten people to try to do that action, but only one does it with conviction.

ES: So, in fact, you work it out, rehearse?

MY: I rehearsed myself. There's no way you can rehearse a fight scene, because as long as you know how to move — your basic punches, your basic kicks — the rest of it is your own personal touches: the look in the eye — the eye of the tiger. People used to think I was crazy, I'd sit looking into the mirror. It's very easy to make a nasty face (laughs) you know in the old days people went "Heh, Heh" (imitates old fashioned villain) But I didn't want to lose the feminine side of that. It's very easy to go to the gym and walk around with pumped up muscles. Everybody would say "Okay, she's a fighter because she's got that 'kung kung, cachunk, cachunk' thing." But if I wasn't fighting, I

was still a woman. It's just when I had to do my action bit, then I was a killing machine. It was difficult to achieve that.



"Jet (Lee's) fighting style is very hard, very down to earth. Ruthless and realistic."

- Michelle Yeoh

ES: How is Jet Lee to work with?

MY: Wonderful! We had such a ball. We would just laugh from the moment we got onto the set until we got off.

ES: When you choreograph a scene with him, did he approach it differently than when you work with Jackie?

MY: Not really. They approach the scene basically as this is what I have to do, this is how it should be done. Then they just get on to do it. They both know their art very well. If they are uncomfortable with something, they say "Uh uh, that doesn't work. Let's try it this way." Jet is very laid back. When he wasn't working the two of us would be hiding in the corner going "Tee Hee Hee," and telling crazy stories and laughing our heads off. When we are called back to our scene we'd both get into it right away.

ES: Is the fight director very important?

MY: I have to depend on them. I am very lucky (touch wood) that I have never had a major accident. I am truly putting my life in their hands. They have to watch you and know when you're going to do your thing and when you're not going to do your thing. The timing is so important. A lot of times even Chinese audiences don't know about these guys. They're heroes in the background and they've never been properly thanked for the work that they do. They only person that actually gets any credit would be the director or the stunt director.

ES: The famous motorcycle stunt in *Super Cop*, was that just straight, no wires?

MY: No wires.

ES: How long did it take to do that, to rehearse it?

MY: We didn't rehearse it. If you rehearse it you'd probably not do it. Someone worked out it out first. Ima, a Thai stuntman, did that scene and broke his leg. Stanley Tong is a very good director and a stunt coordinator. I think if someone else had done the movie, I wouldn't have done the stunt, but Stanley and I worked together years ago when I was doing *Magnificent Warriors*. So I trust him and his work implicitly. When he was choreographing the stunt, it was much to the dismay of our friend Jackie, who thought that it was too dangerous and didn't want me to do it. Stanley would not risk anybody on a stunt that he could not perform himself. That would prove to the people that he works with that he wouldn't put them at risk. The stunt motorcyclists were a little adventurous. They wanted the stunt to be done so that when I landed on the train, the bike didn't roll off the side. We all argued that it was too dangerous. The train is not very wide, the train is moving, and the surface of the train is metal and shiny. There's no friction. Can you imagine when you land on the train -- the impact would have already taken you across half way? So what happened was we calculated that if I take off at a certain angle, I'd be landing correctly.

Before I do my stunt, someone always tests the stunt, especially with major stunts just to make sure that it works, that I'm not going to kill myself. They laid stacked cardboard boxes for about 50 yards along the train. We were all watching this guy. The problem is when you do major stunts you get hundreds of people watching who have never seen a motorcycle jump onto a train before, so it gave him a very hyped up, charged atmosphere. The stunt boy had it in his mind that he would be sensational if he did not go off the train. You have to be at a certain fast speed before you can jump over. It's not very wide -- the distance from the take off ramp onto the train. It was on a hill just about level to the train. We heard the stunt guy screeching around the corner and we thought, oh my God!, he's really going to go for it this time! He took off, landed. If he had just let the bike fall off the train, he would have been fine.

But we saw him try to turn the bike to be running in line with the train. He almost managed to stay on, but the surface was too slippery and his take off was at such a high speed that there was no way that he could control that bike. He was lucky because they built ramps across between the cars just in case. The time I hit my back (in the out takes) if it wasn't for the little bridging ramp in there I might have gone off. So he went up, and the next thing we knew he went off and we heard "Oh, shit!" Jackie and I were on the

other side, watching from the top, and when we heard the "C-c-c-chung!" It was not the sound of boxes, it was the sound of metal. He had landed on the other side on one of the tracks. He was lucky because his leg hit the track. If his head had hit he would have been paralyzed or dead.

ES: So did that encourage you to do the stunt?

MY: It encouraged me to go right off the train and forget about staying on and being a hero! (laughs) I'm really very daring, things like that don't put me off. So now when things go wrong, you just learn the things you cannot do.

ES: How was it to work with Cynthia Rothrock?

MY: Her first Hong Kong movie was *Yes, Madam* with us.



Michelle Yeoh is just hanging around in *Project S*.

At the time when we did the movie, our director, (Corey) Yuen Kwai had just finished *Bloodsport* with Van Damme. He was called back to Hong Kong and was asked to do this action movie. He was very excited. When he got there, he said, "Two girls? You want them to fight?" Before he met me he was thinking, "If this girl turns out to be a pansy, what am I going to do with her?" But he knew Cynthia and her work. He said, "Either I do it the way that I would present two guys fighting or I'm not going to do this because it would take away from the whole thing! I might as well have two really glamorous girls who don't fight and don't do anything but stand there." So I'm glad that he decided to take that road -- this has become very exciting. I think Cynthia had to get used to actually hitting someone. When you are a fighter and you are trying to adapt movements for a movie, it is two very different things. She was used to doing a whole form where she would go through all the motions, and she would not have to, at any particular point, hit someone or get hit. So it was something new for her as well.

ES: Do you actually hit in the film?

MY: Oh, yes, it's full contact.

ES: How hard are you actually hitting each other?

MY: It depends on the director. If it was Stanley (Tong), it would be hard, you'd really get hit.

ES: It looks like Jet hits very hard.

MY: He is a very, hard, tough star. He hits a lot harder than Jackie. Jackie works on a very fast, acrobatic kind of movement. If you look at Jackie's characters, they're normally more comic. He is sort of like a little monkey pouncing around: he's so agile. But Jet's style of fighting is very solid, very down to earth. Realistic and ruthless. He doesn't waste a lot of time in blocking and blocking and blocking. It's one block and POOM you've had it, that's it. Jet has this superb movement that comes from the waist. In *Tai Chi Master*, I was standing beside him and I was supposed to be hit on the head and I was wrestling around. Oh it was scary, I was so nervous. He was supposed to be grabbing onto me so that I wouldn't fall down, but at the same time I was trying to kick and punch these guys that were coming from across and behind me. I swear I could hear his punches go "hooWhoosh! hooWhoosh! hooWhoosh!" Every single time he grabbed me, he didn't just grab me, he literally pounces on you and you drop four inches. He is so powerful! That timing is split second. The reaction has to follow the strike. [At this point, interviewer convinced Miss Yeoh to hit him so that he could feel what it was like. He was rather stunned by the blow, and probably didn't react like a good kung fu star, but did survive to finish the rest of the interview.]

MY: It looks like I was hitting you. Unfortunately out of ten, maybe two or three of the stunt boys are very good. Also you need to have worked with them before. When two people fight in a movie, it is a matter of timing. When you're fighting for real, it doesn't matter whether you have a turn or I have a turn, you just hit each other, beat each other up. But doing a choreographed motion, I have to know your beat.

ES: How much sync sound do they do?

MY: In my entire career I've only done two sync sound movies, which were *Super Cop* (which I think was the first movie Jackie did in sync sound) and *Project S*. I think it's quite a well known thing in Hong Kong that people are dubbed. Jackie's biggest debate is that only in Hong Kong is Cantonese used. Once it goes to Taiwan, Malaysia or Singapore it's all dubbed in Mandarin. So it's much more expensive to make the movie in sync sound. In the end you still have to go back to the studios, because unfortunately the equipment isn't as good as it is here and you still have to re-dub so many parts of the movie. With the fighting scenes, Jackie and I had a lot of fun doing the dubbing. We were both sitting there going "Whoo Hah Hah!" for lots of

different people besides ourselves. It was really hysterical.

ES: Do you have future projects lined up? The Chinese press says you've been talking to Oliver Stone about something. The rumor is there is a project for Marvel Comics: Elektra.

MY: Oliver is a friend. We're not talking on a working basis. We don't have a project. Anything else is all in the discussion and development stages. This year, I'm setting things up since I hurt my knee skiing. You get to a point where you do so many stunts, you think you're invincible! Now I'm recuperating.

ES: In the US now, there is a certain popularity of these films, but many people that would enjoy these films are not seeing them. Do you have anything in mind about this country as a market when the films are made?

MY: Now we are beginning to. It's a market that a lot of people have tried to break into, but unfortunately some have given up. It is a different culture. A lot of producers mainly concentrate on the Southeast Asian market which is more accessible to them because of the language, the culture. Now, the kind of movies that I made, especially *Super Cop* or *Project S* have been tailored more for western audiences as well. The story line is not very complicated, it doesn't have as much "local" humor or cultural things which only Asians would understand. We go on a very general theme: man-woman relationship. All fighting for justice or a basic thing which any people would understand. The rest of it is more visual.

ES: Do you think you want to do dramatic films in the United States or elsewhere?

MY: I'd love to! I think for any actor or actress to be given a chance to do something different is great. I don't want to give up my action movies, because it's something I've worked very, very hard at.. I don't think I can turn around and say I've done the best physical work I can ever do. I'd still like to be able to do both. With Jackie or Jet or myself, it's very easy to say that they're not really good actors or actresses, they're just martial artists. You know, it's not true! If these guys were not convincing with their faces and their body language, you'd never believe that they could fight so well!

ES: What would you say the secret of your success was?

MY: You know I've been very lucky. I'd have to say that luck played a very important part in my life, but then, if I just had good luck and I didn't put hard work to it, I wouldn't be where I am today. So I've worked hard at it.

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Stephen Chiau

Crown Prince of HK Comedies II

I. The Appeal - An Introduction

Midway through *All For The Winner*, there's a scene that pretty much sums up the appeal of Stephen Chiau. Chiau and his uncle Ng Man-tat had just signed a multi-million dollar contract with their Taiwan boss, who has a habit of tilting his head upwards. It's one of those quirky mannerisms movie characters adopt to establish quick identity, like chewing on a match stick or spitting out chaw. Chiau first sets it up by telling Ng that he wants desperately to ask the boss something face to face. The duo then embark on a series of moves to look the boss square in the eyes: bending over, bending over backwards, jumping up and down, climbing over a ledge...The boss in turn goes through moves of his own to avoid being cornered, turning the scene into a 3-way dance, in many ways reminiscent of the choreographed comic routines made famous by Jackie Chan more than a decade ago.

A good 30 seconds later, Chiau finally manages to gain eye contact by climbing on top of Ng's shoulders. And the question he worked so hard to raise? A deadpan, "I just want to ask you why you always look up." This is nothing but a throwaway gag that doesn't seem remotely close to having a narrative function. It's absurd and juvenile in both its presentation and the laugh it generates. Yet we laughed, 'cause it's a great gag.

It pokes fun at a movie cliché, making direct connection with an audience that can be counted as one of the most movie-loving in the world. It's also flawlessly executed with precision timing and coordinated movements, the staples of Chiau's success. For his skill in delivering the comic punch at the right moment and his ability to perform physically-demanding stunts is what earned him the fan's love and their respect. Throw in an eagerness to share the stage with his co-stars — in this case his favorite sidekick Ng and the guy who plays his boss (Does anyone out there know who the hell he is?), in others, the likes of Andy Lau, Kenny Bee, Lam Kwok-bun, Anita Mui, Amy Yip or Sandra Ng — and we have the basic ingredients of a superstar.

But what made Chiau the most dominant star in the history of Hong Kong cinema is his attitude. To top off the gag, Chiau fires off one of his patented one-liners. It's silly, and it's what *mo lay tau* is all about. To recap what I said in the last issue, *mo lay tau* is a popular term referring to an irreverence that's expressed in mischievous, nonsensical remarks. It's an irreverence that captures precisely the frustrations felt by the people of modern Hong Kong. Chiau's one-liner not only provides instant gratification to viewers (when I saw the film in the colony, the remark brought down the house) but also touches them deeply, reminding them of their futility in playing THE

game, whatever it is. Chiau's quest for a piece of the eyeball may be ridiculous, but he succeeds in salvaging a victory over someone who won't give him so much as a look.

The gag, after all, has a bearing on the story. It's all about winning, and Stephen Chiau will do anything to forge a triumph in any situation, if only just in the form of a last word. Chiau is a master of the *Reductio ad absurdum*, and by reducing to the absurd such painful situations as being looked down upon by one's boss, he, like all great comics, turns his work into an experience at once funny, bitter and haunting. The Rodney Dangerfields of the world will get the joke.

II. Components of the Comic King

The rise of Stephen Chiau, as I said last time, is a case of all the stars working together to facilitate the birth of a star. His act itself is also a combination of many elements, a catalog of which is presented in the gag described above. The following is a more detailed discussion of those elements.

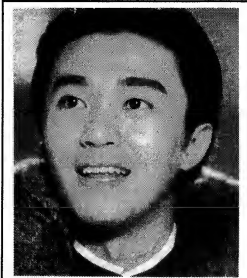
The Underdog

Comic heroes are usually rebels who, deliberately or unconsciously, takes society to task. Chiau does this masterfully, though it never is his intention. He strives to entertain, but in articulating the frustrations of the common man, also manages to throw a pie in the face of social conventions.

Chiau basically worms his way into super stardom by playing the underdog. His early characters are invariably of humble beginnings. In *Love is Love* (1990), he's an orphan from the rural backwaters of New Territories. In *My Hero* (1990), he's a waiter working under demeaning conditions. And in *All for the Winner* (1990), he's the lowest of all social outcasts, a refugee from mainland China. Yet he always succeeds in rising above his wretched station, proving himself by overcoming insurmountable odds. This has enormous appeal for the Hong Kong audience, made up largely of working class stiff and wage slave proles, for whom humiliation is a daily routine and the prospect of breaking through the ranks is dim.

Before reaching final victory, Chiau must first endure all sorts of degradation from people of higher standings. For that, he can always count on his *mo lay tau* attitude for instant relief (see last issue for details).

Then, he's usually given an image makeover, which transforms him from raggedy country hick to suave city slicker. From the famous Chow Yun-fat imitations in *My Hero* and *All for the Winner* — the former, after *A Better Tomorrow*, and the latter, *God of Gamblers* — to the takeoff on James Bond and Tse Yin



Stephen Chiau in Corey Yuen-kwai's *All for the Winner*.

in *From Beijing with Love* (1994), Chiau always makes a big deal of this overhaul in appearance. He revels in self-congratulatory postures, trying to exude an air of importance that he thinks the new garb provides. This is one of Chiau's favorite stunts, one that captures human frailty in all its shadings. We laugh at his vanity, for such reveling only betrays an insecure interior which all the designer clothing in the world can't mask. But we also feel for him, for we would have — or already had — done the same.

As Chiau's popularity rises, his character also goes through an evolution. He wisely branched out to more bourgeois identities that are more in keeping with his public image, such as the consultant in *Tricky Brains* (1991), the cop in the *Fight Back to School* series (1991-93) and the lawyer in *Justice My Foot* (1992). Sometimes, he can even be a member of the privileged class, such as the rich man's son in *King of Beggars* (1993), the elitist calligrapher in *The Flirting Scholar* (1993), the magistrate in *Hail the Judge* (1994) or even a god in *The Mad Monk* (1993). Some of these characters are acknowledged as the best in their respective professions, such as the professional trickster in *Tricky Brains* and the hot-shot lawyer in *Justice My Foot*.

Yet he still managed to command solid support among his largely working-class fans. This he did by always giving himself an impossible task to overcome. Starting with *God of Gamblers II* (1990), in which Chiau and Andy Lau are burdened with upholding the legacy of the mythic Chow Yun-fat, almost every Stephen Chiau movie has used the impossible task as it's premise. This strategy received a resounding ding confirmation in the phenomenal success of *All for the Winner*, in which a hapless bumpkin must defeat the most powerful gambler in the world.

Regardless of social status, Chiau's character is always up against all kinds of odds. The odds usually come in the form of someone entrenched in the power structure, be it a mob boss in *Magnificent Scoundrels* (1991), an evil cult leader in *The Royal Tramp* (1992), or China's most powerful political figure in *Hail the Judge*. A character can be another mainland refugee in *Fist of Fury '91*, the best lawyer this side of Perry Mason in *Justice My Foot*, or a celestial being in *The Mad Monk*, but if he's played by Stephen Chiau in a movie, chances are he's an underdog in whatever mission he's supposed to accomplish.

Of course, no matter how much the cards are stacked against him, Chiau always wins at the end. That's a given. What endears him to the common man is that he also wins in another game during the movie, albeit in an oblique way. As the embodiment of the *mo lay tau* attitude, he bounces endlessly off the people and situations around him, in the process revealing the superiority of his comic mind over the social constraints always threatening to put him in check.

Those constraints can be societal conditions (like those in *All for the Winner*, *Fist of Fury '91*, *The Flirting Scholar*, *The Mad Monk*, or *Love on Delivery*), work place structures (*Tricky Brains*), mob etiquette (*My Hero*, *Magnificent Scoundrels*), the government (*Justice My Foot*, *The Royal Tramp I & II*, *The King of Beggars*, *Hail to the Judge*) or school restrictions (the *Fight*

Back to School series), but Chiau can always find a way to scoff at the sacred cows of convention, winning a last laugh at their expense. His antics, like those of Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Woody Allen and other great movie comics, are victories of the mind over social absurdities.

Verbal Humor

The major reason Stephen Chiau comedies are not well received outside of Asia is because they rely so much on verbal humor. Worse, much of that humor is derived from puns and parodies of social conventions, making it impossible to translate. Here, I will attempt to do the thankless job of explaining what is funny in Chiau's films.

Let's start with a ready example from one of his most recent works, *From Beijing With Love*. The Chinese title, Ling Ling Chaut, is itself a joke. It stand for the name of the spy played by Chiau. Ling is a legitimate Chinese sur name, but put the whole name together, and it just happens to sound like the numbers zero, zero, and seven. I hope you get the joke.

Puns working on the same principle can be found splattered all over every film of Chiau's. Sometimes, it's in the form of violent threat that turned into a practical joke, like in *Love on Delivery*, when Chiau, in a fight with Ng Man-tat, vows to cut up the



Stephen Chiau in *Love on Delivery*

latter's face, a common threat used by gangsters to shake up innocent women. But in Cantonese, the words for "cut up" also mean "paint flowers", which is exactly what Chiau does to Ng's mug.

Another favorite form of puns is the play on cuss words. A classic example is a one-two punch that Chiau cracks in *The Flirting Scholar*. While describing arch enemies of the scholar's family, he reveals that one is Little Trumpet (Siu La Ba), which sounds a lot like "fuck his mother" (Dew La Ma), the most offensive form of insult for the Hong Kong people. That cuts up the audience. Then Chiau goes on to mention another enemy, who's known as Little Lee Flying Daggers, a familiar moniker from a popular pulp novel. Lee apparently learned his skill from his mother, who, Chiau reasons, should then be called Little Lee's Mother Flying Daggers, which sound a lot like "flying daggers that fuck your mother". With that, people are rolling in the aisles.

Often times, the puns work visually, like in *God of Gamblers II*, when, during a game, Chiau is seemingly beaten by his oppo-

ment's four acres. He'll need to perform a miracle to win. Low and behold, he comes up with five cigarettes. Impossible as it is, I'll try to explain the nuances of this joke with an example in English. "Cigarettes" are pronounced exactly like "aces", but to equate "five cigarette" with "five aces" bends the rule of the Cantonese language, like addressing a unit of explosives as "a rod of dynamite." Dynamite is shaped like a rod, but we just don't call it as such. We call it a Stick. Why? No reason. In the mouth of a good comic, such arbitrariness becomes a medium through which absurdities are exposed.

Hong Kong being a British colony, the use of English also provides fodder for Chiau's humor. His sidekick in *From Beijing with Love*, for example, is called Tart Man Sai, which is the Chinese translation for the painter Leonardo Da Vinci. In *God of Gamblers III*, the name for a woman gunslinger in Lung Gao. The same two words in reverse order is Gao Lung, the Chinese words for Kowloon, Hong Kong's peninsular district. Assuming the western way of saying the surname last, the woman's English name, Chiau figures, should therefore be "Kowloon."

In *King of Beggars*, his character is a Manchurian. The English translation of his name should normally be based on it's Manchurian pronunciation. Instead, it's based on its Cantonese pronunciation, which has an awkward five syllables. As if that's not crazy enough, he turns the whole name around, again invoking the surname-last tradition. So Cha Ha Yee Chan, therefore, Becomes Chan Yee Ha Cha So.

Sometimes, he makes us laugh by saying normal things in inappropriate situations, such as the use of modern speak in his costume pictures. The incongruity of hearing historical figures like the *Flirting Scholar* or the *Mad Monk* talk in the latest of slang becomes humor, much the same way we find funny Bill and Ted's addressing Socrates as "dude" in their excellent adventures.

The most subtle of Chiau's verbal humor is his accent. Knowing that his mouth is where his money is, Chiau has always insisted on recording his own dialogue, thus adding new in jokes, during the dub. His voice thus becomes an immediate marker of his work. He may not be like that in real life, but on film, he speaks with a slight trace of exaggerate country. There isn't much of an accent, but with certain words, he always underlines them with a little oomph or a minute dose of aaah. It's a bit like a Texas immigrant to a New Yorker, who, despite an effort to hide his twang, somehow lets a "ya'll" to escape here and there; and when it slips out, it hits the ear especially hard. In the United States, regional accents are associated with certain degrees of charm and pride, but in Hong Kong, bumpkin talk is never anything but plebeian. Chiau's accent, therefore, nudges us to laugh as him a little while also feeling for him a little.

(Karl Maka, who occupied the throne of Hong Kong comedies during the vacuum between Michael Hui and Stephen Chiau, is the last movie comic who used an accent to establish an immediate identity. While Chiau's speech pattern has no clear geographical origin, Maka's is distinctly Toi San, the dialect of southern, mostly rural Kwangtung. Regardless, the lineage of language between the two comics probably is the main reason

Maka manages to pull off the feat as Chiau's most memorable on-screen father in *Magnificent Scoundrels*.)

Deadpan Delivery and Precision Timing

All the great jokes in the world aren't worth a cent without good execution. Chiau, like the best of comedians, didn't become what he is without a superb command of his timing. He's the kind of comic who's able to illicit hysterical laughter with mediocre jokes. This he accomplishes with a combination of his idiosyncratic line reading and an iconoclastic deadpan delivery. Unlike Jackie Chan, whose clown face is composed of a boundless series of muscles rigged to an overactive nerve center, Chiau has a visage deliberately excised of emotions. His slightly accented speech is regulated with measure phrases and exaggerated pauses, calling attention to the blankness of his face, written all over with fake seriousness.

That usually happens right before he unleashes a burst of crazed comic energy. An early example can be found in *My Hero*, when he and his mobster pals have cornered an informer. We know something is going to happen, and the snitch will either receive a serious tongue slashing or be beaten to a pulp. But Chiau calmly and politely gives out a series of loony directions: move a little right, a little left, half a step forward...as we ponder the purpose of such meaningless niceties, Chiau suddenly turns into a wild animal, pounding on the informer with all the exaggerations a ham actor can summon. The seriousness at the start and the precision timing of the outburst make the gag work all the better.

Physical Comedy

Anyone who has seen a Stephen Chiau movie can tell that the crown prince of Hong Kong comedies is also very good at physical action. He's obviously had martial arts training, so flexible and agile that he doesn't need stunt doubles while performing fight sequences of high difficulty. In fact, his acrobatic ability is one of the keys to his meteoric rise to stardom.

Hong Kong audiences, after years of exposure to high-caliber action, are very good at smelling out imposters. They can be unforgiving too. Pretenders are usually scorned, like matinee idol Cheng Siu Chau (the father in *Drunken Master III*), who tried his hands and feet at kung fu in the late seventies but was promptly rebuffed by the fans. That's why Jackie Chan always insists on performing his own stunts, no matter how dangerous.

Chiau earned his action credentials early on, frequently engaging in serious fight scenes with all the gusto. He also makes it a point to loosen things up with comic falls during the fights, often playing a bumbling fighter who, despite getting all the moves down pat, always misses the target by only that much.

This is already evident in the 1990 film *My Hero*, in which the persons that would elevate Chiau to the most dominant position in Hong Kong film history begins to emerge. One of the most unforgettable moments in the film is when, after a serious, drawn out fight, Chiau has managed to capture one of the bad

guys. Pointing a gun at his captive, he starts going through the movie-hero bit, yelling out authoritative commands and kicking away the bad guy's gun. Only problem is, unlike real movie heroes ("real movie heroes" must be an oxymoron, one that should give us a clue to the mechanism of Chiau's comedy), he just can't get his almighty foot to connect with the gun he wishes to kick.

The genius of Chiau's comedy is that this routine is so human. We can all sympathize with this little man, trying to concentrate on holding the bad guy at bay while performing the larger than life. The devastating blow is that he's not.

Through out his career, Chiau has made a strong connection with legendary Bruce Lee. *Fist of Fury '91* is a comic remake of Lee's hit of the same name, with some scenes duplicated line by line. He often assumes Lee's posture, either illegitimate fight scenes or parodies of them. It should be noted that many of his films has the word "dragon" (lung) in the Chinese title, which evokes Lee's Chinese name (Lee Siu Lung, meaning "Little Dragon"). Chiau's frequent evocation of the dragon is, if not a tribute, at least an attempt to ride on the mythic star's legend. Stephen Chiau movies with "dragon" in their titles are: *Dragon Fight* (1989), *Love is Love* (1990), *My Hero* (1990), *Lung Fung Restaurant* (1990), *Legend of the Dragon* (1991), the *Fight Back to School* series (1991-3), and *Fist of Fury '91 II* (1992).

With *All for the Winner* (1990), the film that catapulted him to superstardom, Chiau proves that he can extend his bodily ability to comic employ. The *tour de farce* in which he imitates in real time Chow Yun-fat's slow-mo entrance is now the stuff of legends, a historical point at which the scepter of cinematic rule is passed on from one star to another.

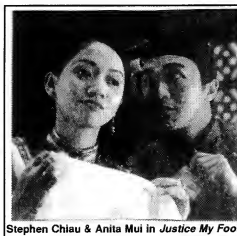
Any doubts about Chiau's physical talent is all but erased a few months after *Winner* by *Legend of the Dragon*, a billiard-playing take-off of kung fu movies and gambling flicks. In it, Chiau can be seen making very difficult pool shots without camera tricks or stunt doubles. From then on, he has never ceased performing amazing physical gags, the latest being the re-staging of a Jackie Chan stunt in *From Beijing with Love*, in which a hat thrown backward lands perfectly on a coat tree.

Popular Culture Parodies

Hong Kong movies are often catalogues of popular culture. The work of Stephen Chiau is no exception. Like the ZAZ (Zucker, Abrahams, and Zucker) team of *Airplane* and *Naked Gun* fame, Chiau gets a lot of mileage out of parodying hit movies, TV programs and public events. Hong Kong being an international city, Chiau has an edge over his American counterparts by drawing from a much broader and deeper pool of material.

If film is an imitation of human behavior, then the parody of movies is an imitation of an imitation. Chiau is a master in recognizing the contrivance of the initial imitation and is thus able to make his parody hit all the more harder. In *From Beijing with Love*, he receives a message — itself a take off on say movies, with the words appearing on a bathroom mirror after it gets

fogged up by steam — to meet Anita Yuen, who will be carrying a red rose. When he gets to the rendezvous, the one holding the flower is a dog, one of the many that Yuen is attending to. This parody of Yuen's breakthrough hit, *C'est La Vie, Mon Cheri*, makes us laugh not only at the cleverness of the imitation, but also at our detachment from the original scene.



Stephen Chiau & Anita Mui in *Justice My Foot*

Other movie take-offs include the parody of *Basic Instinct* in *Fight Back to School III*, *The Terminator* and Japanese sci-fi in *Love on Delivery*, and James Bond movies and the TV series *Get Smart* in *From Beijing with Love*. References to other popular culture

sources include Cantonese-opera like fights in *Fists of Fury '91*, a variation of the East-West-South-North figures of the pulp novel *Eagles Shooting Heroes* in *The Flirting Scholar*, and satiric remarks about the Basic Law negotiations between Britain and China in *King of Beggars*.

The most inspired of Chiau's parodies is the ones he did on himself. In *God of Gamblers II*, he admonishes the villain for being *mo lay tau* (the subtitle in my version of the tape refers to it only as "nonsense"). The situation of having the patron saint of *mo lay tau* accusing someone of same is more than the pot calling the tea kettle black. It's the coal calling the snow it's about to defile dirty.

But the most memorable of Chiau's self references is the opening of *Fist of Fury '91*. In it, Chiau goes through the same routine as his character in *All for the Winner* does, only to see the first Chiau arriving in alimo, ignoring the second Chiau like the first Chiau was ignored in the earlier film. Even more bizarre is that *All For the Winner*, the film being parodied here, is itself a take-off on an earlier film, the Chow Yun-fat vehicle *God of Gamblers*.

Juvenile Humor

The Hong Kong cinema has always counted on young audiences to sustain its box office and its comedies had long had a tradition of vulgar, juvenile jokes. This is even more so for Chiau, who had hosted a children's show on TV for several years and thus has a built-in youth audience that grew up with him on the tube.

His juvenile comedy is essentially expressed in two ways: sexual humor and bodily-functions jokes. Audiences familiar with syndicated TV will find a lot of Chiau in the British program Benny Hill. The raunchy but harmless brand of sexual antics of Hill, together with their mostly nonverbal execution, went down well in Hong Kong, attracting an across-the-board audi-

ence. Chiau's sexual humor contains a similar appeal. It's fueled by hormones and executed with the giggling delight teenagers feel when talking about a subject they're obsessed with, but do not quite understand. The jokes are often more naughty than dirty, titillating enough to make us laugh, but not offensive enough to alarm us.

Early in his career, his sexual humor is mostly concerned with puberty, such as his character's name in *Fist of Fury '91*. Lau Jing sounds like "premature ejaculation", a point that was belabored in an early scene. The same mechanism applies to the name of his dream girl in *All for the Winner*. The "Mung" in Yee Mung is "dream" all right, but "Yee" happens to mean "sexual thoughts". Put the words together, and Yee Mung is nothing but a wet dream.

As the years wear on — which is Chiau's case is just a matter of two or three — he graduates to a more adult form of entertainment, such as the truck that carries the dinosaur head in *From Beijing with Love*, which advertises in huge letters "Extra Strength Three-Penis Pill", an aphrodisiac.

His bodily-function humor is more vulgar and works on an even less mature level. Jokes on bad breath, body odor, urination, flatulence and bowel movements are abound. It's as though he's a kid stuck forever in the anal stage. To his defense, bodily-function humor has long been a staple of the Hong Kong cinema. Chiau's contribution is merely the continuation of a tradition.

Sharing the Stage

Much of Chiau's success depends on him interacting with other comics, bouncing jokes and high jinx at one another like a game of bumper cars. Chiau has always been generous in



Lam Kwok-bun(left) and Stephen Chiau in *Fight Back to School*.

sharing the stage with other actors. In fact, he is responsible for making stars out of a couple of

sidekicks, the most notable being the always faithful Ng Man-tat, who has been playing second fiddle in almost every film of Chiau's over since their successful partnership in *All for the Winners*. The other actor who rode Chiau's coattail to semi-stardom is Lam Kwok-bun, the four-eyed, baby-faced fellow student in *Fight back to School*.

One reason for his constant pairing with other comics is that he, in comedy parlance, at once a funny man and the straight man, an actor and a reactor. As mentioned earlier, he frequently alternates between deadpan humor and sudden releases of comic energy. Such practice works best with a partner who can prod him at the down curve and absorb the abuse when the graph swings high. That's why Ng is such a

good sidekick, for he's a good enough actor to switch effortlessly between funny and straight, serving as compliment to Chiau's ever-changing moods.

Other performers who had shined next to Chiau include Sandra Ng Kwan Yu in *All for the Winner* and *Magnificent Scoundrels*, Kenny Bee in *Fist of Fury '91*, Teresa Mo in *Legend of the Dragon*, Tricky Brains, and *Magnificent Scoundrels*, Amy Yip in *Magnificent Scoundrels*, and Josephine Siao Fong Fong in *Fist of Fury '91 II*.

Of course, Chiau is also savvy enough to know where to draw the line at generosity. He always makes sure that he would not be upstaged. Other stars may capture the center stage now and then, but Chiau always gets the most laughs in any given movie. This is probably why he keeps going back to Ng Man Tat, who, no matter how skillful in acting or how adept at comedy, is never charismatic or talented enough to snatch the spotlight from him.



Stephen Chiau and Ng Man-tat in *A Chinese Odyssey Part I*.

III. The Ever Changing Stephen Chiau

Despite all these constants, Stephen Chiau had gone through a lot of changes throughout the years. Starting with 1990, when he burst on the scene, his career invariably goes through a new phase every year. Given the importance of the Chinese New Year season, during which the film industry is expected to make most of its profit, it's not a coincidence that Chiau always starts a new phase at the beginning of the year.

The year 1990 was his road to stardom, on the journey of which he was still trying to find an identity. He made a total of eleven pictures that year. Although he had already embodied the *mo lay tau* attitude and the underdog persona in his act, his career was still unfocused. *Love is Love*, *Unmatchable Match*, *Just Heroes*, for example, are comedies that bear little resemblance to the rest of his canon. *The Triad Story* is even a hero film, with absolutely no attempts for laughs. Of course, his being offered dramatic roles had a lot to do with the success of his first film appearance in *Final Justice*, which won him the Best Supporting Actor in the prestigious Golden Horse Awards. (Note: In the last issue, I erroneously listed the prize as the Hong Kong Academy Award instead of the Gold Horse. My humble apologies.)

By the end of 1990, Chiau had already entered the rank s of superstar, with *All for the Winner* breaking records all over the place. That allowed him to demand more creative control and

1991 is undoubtedly the most creative year in his phenomenal but so far still very short career. He made seven films in that year, though one of them, *The Banquet*, is a *Grand Hotel* type New Year project in which he shares the bill with other stars. Of the six he's responsible for, five are included in the top twelve commercial hits of the year. Creatively, he was able to apply his special brand of humor to a myriad of topics, each time with remarkable success. He also began to modify his



Chiau won a Golden Horse Award for Best Supporting Actor in the Danny Lee action / thriller, *Final Justice*.

cover cop in *Fight Back to School*, broke the record that he set the year before.

The zenith of Chiau's career was 1992, with all five of his films finishing in the top ten, while capturing the top four spots of the box office list. (Technically, he had released seven films in 1992, but one, *All's Well, Ends Well*, is another collaborative New Year Project, and another, *King of Beggars*, was released late December, doing the lion's share of it's business in the following year.) Despite the unprecedented success, staleness began to emerge in his work, showing signs of creative fatigue. *Justice My Foot*, however, remains one of Chiau's best, first because of the presence of the always-wonderful Anita Mui, second because of the freshness of seeing Chiau do his shtick in a costume picture, and third, perhaps the most significant, because he started questioning his own persona, challenging the moral responsibility of the *mo lay tau* attitude.

With the peak he reached in 1992, Chiau had no place to go but down. It doesn't help that three of the four films he released in 1993 (I'm including *Beggars*) are costume comedies, all the freshness of which had been exhausted the year before in the *Royal Tramp* series. Also, the premise of Chiau being a member of the privileged class — a rich man's son in *Beggars*, an elite calligrapher in *The Flirting Scholar* and a god, no less, in *The Mad Monk* — forced to suffer in humble environments is just not very convincing. The only contemporary film of the year was *Fight Back to School III*, a sequel that had overdrawn its usefulness.

Scholar and *Beggars* were the top two commercial hits of 1993 and *Fight III* made it into the top ten, but Chiau's decline in creativity was evident. Although Chiau had been steadily reducing his output every year, partly because of physical burn-out and partly because he wanted to devote more effort to each project, neither the quality or the box-office take had showed any drastic improvement.

The year 1994, started out dismally, relatively speaking, for him

too. His New Year release, *Love on Delivery*, lost out on a head-to-head showdown with Jackie Chan's *Drunken Master II*, both films being release at the same time. He would go on to relinquish, second time in a row, the box-office crown he had held for three years to Hollywood, having been beat by *Jurassic Park* the previous year, and by *Speed* in 1994.

To add insult to injury, his midyear release, *Hail the Judge*, despite capitalizing on the heat generated by a hit TV soap, wasn't able to surpass the disappointing performance of *Delivery*. Worse, 1994 was also the first time since 1990 he was beaten by other Hong Kong products, finishing third to *Master* and — this really hurts — another comedy, the New Year melodrama *It's a Wonderful Life* (Reviewed in HKFC as *The Richest Family*).

But then everything ain't all bad. *From Beijing with Love* finished strongly, not only putting him in third place in the year-end tally, but also creating a fresh character, an alternately bumbling and capable spy, whose lowly position is convincingly caused by political as well as bureaucratic forces. That he is stationed in Beijing also gives Chiau endless possibilities in exploiting his *mo lay tau* sensibilities and underdog status. The success of *Beijing* is a sign that we will have Stephen Chiau to kick around for more than just a little longer.

Note: Chiau goes through two Tse Yin imitations in *Beijing*. The first is of the dark-suit-bright-tie-black hat-plus-shades get up of Tse's matinee idol days. The second is the cigar-dangling, silk robe-draping, black rim-spectabled seducer of recent years.

-Sam Ho

Stephen Chiau Filmography

1988	<i>Final Justice</i> <i>Unfaithfully Yours</i>	<i>Magnificent Scoundrels</i> <i>The Banquet</i>
1989	<i>Thunder Cops II</i> <i>Dragon Fight</i>	1992 <i>Fist of Fury '92</i> <i>All's Well, Ends Well</i> <i>Fight Back to School II</i> <i>Justice My Foot</i> <i>Royal Tramp</i> <i>Royal Tramp II</i> <i>King of Beggars</i>
1990	<i>Love is Love</i> <i>My Hero</i> <i>Lung Fung Rest</i> <i>Unmatchable Match</i> <i>Curry and Pepper</i> <i>Sleazy Dizzy</i> <i>Just Heroes</i> <i>All for the Winner</i>	1993 <i>Fight Back to School III</i> <i>Flirting Scholar</i> <i>The Mad Monk</i>
1991	<i>Tricky Brains</i> <i>Legend of the Dragon</i> <i>Fist of Fury '91</i> <i>Fight Back to School</i> <i>God of Gamblers III</i>	1994 <i>Love on Delivery</i> <i>Hail the Judge</i> <i>From Beijing with Love</i> 1995 <i>A Chinese Odyssey I</i> <i>A Chinese Odyssey II</i>

Linguistic Diversity and Chinese Cinema

When a non-Chinese person meets a Chinese person, the questions that always come up is if the new acquaintance speaks Cantonese or Mandarin, as if there were only two spoken versions of Chinese. However, movie-goers are gradually becoming aware of a third dialect called Taiwanese, otherwise known as Southern Fujianese, thanks to highly-acclaimed films like *City of Sadness*, *Dust of Angles* and *The Puppetmaster*.



Tony Leung Chiu-wai & Brigitte Lin star in *Chung King Express*.

A familiarity of China's linguistic makeup will enhance one's appreciation of Chinese films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China. China, a land of many ethnic groups, which includes Tibetans, Turks, Russians, Mongols, Thais, Koreans, Hans, and many others, is dominated by the culture of the 90% majority called the Hans. In fact, what is popularly known as "Chinese" culture is Han culture, and it is this culture that dominates most of China, all of Hong Kong, Taiwan and the overseas Chinese communities of Europe, Africa, Australia, Southeast Asia, and the Americas. Considered a monolithic cultural and ethnic entity, the Han Chinese are a monocultural, but multilingual group held together by common values, and most important, a common written language. In other words, a book written by a Cantonese person is read with equal ease by readers in Beijing, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Amoy, and Hanzhou, who speak mutually unintelligible in Chinese languages. Hence, Chinese movies carry subtitles in Chinese. Otherwise, some members of the audience might not understand anything.

75 percent of the Han population speak Mandarin as their first language. These people inhabit northeastern, northern and southwestern China, but a modified version of Beijing Mandarin has been declared the standard for the Chinese nation; that is Mainland China and Taiwan. However, the other 25% of Han Chinese who reside on the Southeastern coast speak ten mutually unintelligible tongues, as different from each other as Spanish is from French. Mandarin, however, is the language of mass media. Since the 1920's, the Chinese Establishment has always wanted to rid China of this "Tower of Babel" situation. As a result, campaigns have been waged to promote Mandarin as the language of mass media and education in China, Taiwan, and the Chinese communities of Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. This movement was promoted especially tyrannically during the 40's, 50's, 60's, and 70's in Taiwan, where school children were forced to speak only Mandarin under the threat of punishment.

Furthermore, the dialogue in films had to be delivered in perfectly accented Mandarin, even though less than perfect Mandarin was tolerated in the media. From the birth of Chinese talkie in the 30's

in Shanghai, to the 70's in post-liberation China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, all significant filmmaking was done in Mandarin. Films were also made in Cantonese in Hong Kong, but these films, including the now-popular Wong Fei-hong series, were sneered at by those who prided themselves on being culturally literate. In the minds of many Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong, only Mandarin or American films merited their attention. This contempt and disdain led to the eventual demise of Cantonese cinema in the early 60's. This is where things get complicated.

As the Communists were taking over China, the Mandarin movie industry gradually moved south to Hong Kong, where they continued to produce films in Mandarin. Even in Cantonese speaking Hong Kong, aspiring actors and actresses were required to speak impeccable Mandarin or go through rigorous speech training under a teacher like David Chiang's mother, Hong Wei, who is probably better remembered as a real life "Henry Higgins," than as an actress.

From the beginning of sound in films to the 60's, movies in Taiwan and Hong Kong were shot in synch sound. Talented actors and actresses who did not pass the language requiem were excluded from the industry while the older generation of stars were becoming too old to play younger roles. Seeing a need for a remedy, directors like Chang Cheh and Li Han Hsiang saw voice dubbing as a solution to accommodate new talent like Jimmy Wany Yu. Chen Kwan-tai, Lo Hieh, Alexander Fu Sheng, and Ti Lung are performers who presently speak flawless Mandarin.

Mandarin films continued to enjoy popularity until Cantonese cinema rebounded with the arrival of Michael and Samuel Hui's *The Way Gamblers Play*, *The Genius* and *The Idiot*, and *The Private Eyes*, which gave Cantonese cinema a new life and respectability that it had never enjoyed. Since then, Mandarin-speaking stars from Taiwan and China have been clamoring to work in Hong Kong, making voice dubbing necessary.

During the hey day of Mandarin films in Hong Kong, films were shown with their original soundtrack and the subtitles in Chinese characters. Since the "Renaissance" in the 70's, the people in Hong Kong have realized that there is nothing shameful about seeing a film with a Cantonese soundtrack. So now, films from there have two versions, one is in Cantonese for Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States. The other is in Mandarin for Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and other parts of Southeast Asia.

In the past five years, there has been a trend towards shooting in synch sound. Quite a few quality films like *Days of Being Wild*, *Private Eye Blues*, *Ashes of Time*, *Chung King Express*, *To Live and Die in Tsimshatsui*, *Project S*, and *Supercop* were all shot in synch sound. In fact, shooting in synch seems to be the norm in 1995. Mandarin speakers like Faye Wong, Sylvia Chang, Nicky Wu Chi-lung, Blacky Ko, and Wu Sien-lien have mastered Cantonese so well that they can do their own lines.

Content, not politics, should dictate the language of a film. Hong Kong's Stanley Kwan and Clara Law did *Red Rose*, *White Rose* and *Temptation of a Monk*, respectively, in Mandarin. Moreover, Stanley Kwan's *Center Stage* was shot synch sound in Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shanghainess, while Clara Law's *Autumn Moon* was shot in Cantonese; both were shown in Taiwan with their original soundtracks. Local films are either in Taiwan Mandarin or Taiwanese. Does this mean that art is triumphing over linguistic politics?

-Yatsen Chan

Cheezy Entertainment: The Crazy Low Budget Filmmakers of Hong Kong

It would probably be fair to say that most visionary filmmakers, no matter how different they may be, often have a very distinctive, instantly recognizable style. Think about it: Isn't a Tsui Hark picture made up with it with an onslaught of outrageous action. Characters routinely fly through the air and defy all the laws of physics, combining the gunplay action of *The Killer* with the wire antics of *Iron Monkey*, if you can imagine that! The story, with tow different they may be, often have a very distinctive, instantly recognizable style. think about it: Isn't a Tsui Hark picture instantly identifiable as such? How about John Woo, Dario Argento, or the Cohen Brothers? These directors, plus countless others, are so stylistically strong that one gets the feeling that even if their name wasn't in the credits, the filmmakers recurring of Chong's filmography, it would be difficult to deny the outrageous entertainment value of these movies.

Latest Vengeance, despite it's exploitative title, this movie has virtually nothing in common with Chang Cheh's powerful and violent 1970 melodrama. It represents a streamlining of his previous movie, resulting in a much better package. Bring back most of the cast from *Latest Vengeance* (including Lau Shek-ming who played the protagonist and Cheung Fong-ngain as the antagonist), and shooting on what are obviously the same sets, *21 Red List* is so similar in both style and tone to that aftermentioned movie, that at times it almost seems like the same flick! Luckily it's a new and improved version, and the problems that plagued it's predecessor have all but a. For while Chong's movie has violence in spades and shares Chang's spirit of nihilism, it doesn't come close to the mesmerizing imagery and layered storyline of the seventies' Shaw Brothers classic. But hey, what Chong lacks in mood and symbolism, he forced upon Chinese citizens by Japanese invaders. Determined to keep the list out of the enemies hands, the thief's father sends the group to Shanghai to hide out, where instead they become tangled up in a web of intrigue and deceit, setting the stage for young kids from China immigrating to Shanghai where they get mixed up with warring Triad gangs and grow up into their violent worlds, may be fraught with double crosses and conspiracies, but in the end is just a framework for the action set pieces. The low budget rarely show here, and the ten minute action climax is quite a rouser, with martial arts brawls, vicious gunplay, and bloody sword fights exploding across the screen as the movie works it's way towards (yet another) hilariously mean spirited finale. There is some unexpected graphic sex that doesn't seem to jive with the rest of the movie, and the pace lags a little in the middle, but for the most part, *Latest Vengeance* is a totally ridiculous and fun time waster.

Chong's next picture, *21 Red List*, represents a streamlining of his previous movie, resulting in probably his best paced, most ambitious film to date. Bringing back most of the cast from *Latest Vengeance*, and shooting on what are obviously the same sets, *21 Red List* is so similar in both style and tone to that aftermentioned movie, that at times it almost seems

like the same flick! Luckily it's a new and improved version, and the problems that plagued it's predecessor have all but fallen by the wayside in favor of more action and violence. The story, harking back to the old style Chinese vs. Japanese chopsocky flicks of the early seventies, concerns a group of



Latest Vengeance: A Wild Ride

stealthy thieves who steal the titular 21 red lists, an unequal treaty forced upon Chinese citizens by Japanese invaders. Determined to keep the list out of the enemies hands, the thief's father sends the group to Shanghai to hide out, where instead they become tangled up in a web of intrigue and deceit, setting the stage for...well, you know. While the twist ending is hardly surprising, the brutal ending is not only Chong's most cruel to date, but one of the cruelest I've seen in any action movie, as not only do our heroes die painful deaths, but they die in vain...with the Japanese army victorious! Unbelievable.

The most amazing aspect about Chong's action scenes is the fact that it doesn't matter how crazy they are — he pulls back the camera and tries to get everything in one shot much like Jackie Chan would do. Even some of the martial arts stuntwork (wires pulling back a person when he / she gets kicked) mimic that of a Jackie Chan or Sammo Hung film. In one incredible sequence, one of our heroines delivers a kick from over the back of her head, knocking her attacker in the face, after which she quickly proceeds to snatch up a sword, wack off the baddies head, and kicks his headless body, sending it sailing away! Pretty fun stuff, really. Sure, it's a little goofy

and predictable, but definitely a fun way to spend an hour and a half.

And that's exactly the whole point: Chong's two efforts aren't anything revolutionary, and sometimes they have serious faults...but they are fun, and his unique style makes them stand out from other low budget films. So, in conclusion, if you want a break from the more "serious" and "arty" pictures that have been coming out of the Hong Kong mainstream lately, then give these films a shot, and while you may not come away enlightened in any way, you'll probably have fun with these cheezy and exciting movies.

Chong is not the only low budget director of craziness -- meet Shou Yuen-fong. While Shou's only film critiqued here doesn't mean that all of his films are this way, the action is very close to something that the stylish Clarence Ford would put together. Shou's *A Martial Arts Dream* remains relatively unseen by most fans, but is a real hoot of a movie and worth a look.

The plot follows a pair of aspiring movie stars and the pretty comic book artist they both fall for. She has based her latest comic on the both of them, turning the two into dueling swordsmen in ancient China, allowing for several period kung fu fantasy sequences to worm their way into the movie. When Gao, a lowly wanna-be stuntman, finds out that not only has his love modeled her comic book villain on him, but that she is also pursuing a romance with his best pal, he goes crazy and decides to become a villain in real life as well, joining up with the local triad gangs as a vicious hit man! Of course, all this leads to much violence and tragedy, climaxing in a particularly jaw dropping (not to mention gleeful) bit of nihilism. The movie introduces all the ridiculous aspects that make this picture so much fun: outrageous plotlines combined with wild kinetic action sequences, creating tales in which hardly a single second is plausible, yet the whole thing is played completely straight, as if everyone involved had very little knowledge that they were creating something quite so ludicrous.

It's kind of like if the crazed attitude of Clarence Ford, the dopey enthusiasm of Ed Wood, and the "speed it up and slow it down" Yuen Woo-ping school of wirework fight choreography all come together to make the kind of brainless time waters we all like to watch, but rarely admit to enjoying. Shou does insert some camp styled humor, most notably in the character of the gravity defying, nasal spray sniffing, kung fu fighting triad gangster villain(!). Nevertheless, even with all its considerable charms, *A Martial Arts Dream* does suffer somewhat from its low budget. With its occasionally amateurish wire stunts and music stolen from American movies, there is always room for improvement. I can't wait to see what his next film will look like!

While *Latest Vengeance* and *A Martial Arts Dream* can be easily found on laserdisc and Cantonese video tape, *21 Red List* has still not shown up. You can only find it on the Mandarin tape. (Go to page 31 for the Chinese characters)

-Joey OBryan

Fist of Fury: From One Lee to the Next

The sign reads "No Dogs and Chinese Allowed", hanging near an entrance that our hero wants to pass through. Having put up with a number of rude insults from some racist Japanese, he finally snaps, lashing out with his feet and fists and finally, defiantly, leaping into the air and kicking the offending sign up off the wall. As it flies through the air, so does our hero, as he gracefully demolishes the sign with a brutal kick, detailed lovingly in slow motion. And the audience cheers...and the rest is, of course, Hong Kong movie history.

Probably any fanatic (or more to the point, anyone reading this magazine...) of kung fu films should recognize the above description as the famous scene from *Fist of Fury* (U.S. title: *The Chinese Connection*), arguably Bruce Lee's finest movie, and an undisputed classic of the martial arts genre. This scene...this image of unapologetic nationalism held much more weight in the collective unconscious of it's Chinese audiences than just an action shot of Bruce Lee breaking a sign with a well placed kick; this was a "Proud Chinese Standing Up for His Race." The resonance of the sequence was reflected not only by it's record breaking box office success, but by the critics as well: Hong Kong critic Mel Tobias cynically called, "A sign... curiously aroused Chinese patriotism with Lee saving the 'face' of the yellow race. The Yellow Peril who is the ultimate Chinese macho man is personified in Lee's fury as he save the Chinese heritage against the Japanese." While *Cinema of Vengeance* author Verina Glaessner had this to say: "What rises the film out of the ordinary, however, is...the flying kick with which he demolishes the sign that reads "No Dogs or Chinese Allowed" - an image that floats out of the film, becoming, in a sense an emblem of the films themselves." Nicely said, indeed.

The story of *Fist of Fury* is simple, effective, and for the purposes of the martial arts genre, a classic one: Based on the true story of Chinese folk hero Chen Zhen, Lee plays the student of legendary fighter Hao Yuen Chia, who has been recently killed in a duel with a Japanese master. Driven mad with grief, Lee stars about discovering the truth behind his masters death, at the same time fighting off a rival Japanese karate school. Director Lo Wei, who had made Lee a star in *The Big Boss*, directs (and co-stars as a concerned policeman) with a steady hand, creating an unusual amount of tension in both the fighting, and non-fighting, sequences; a studied brand of tension that is, oddly enough, given the films content, reminiscent of Japanese filmmaking. And what a performance from Lee! All tensed muscles, animal yelps, and smoldering stares, Lee plays Chen Zhen as a doomed, savage hero, a hothead whose "heroic" actions almost always bring tragedy to his friends and loved ones. In the end, Lee goes out with great anti-heroic style: Rather than be captured for his "crimes" of avenging his teacher, Lee launches into a flying kick, aiming himself right into the police rifles, which gun him down, sending Lee out with a literal bang. And who can

forget those swirling arms just before Chen beats the bejesus out of the hired Russian fighter, the disguises he uses to elude the police, or the devastating slow motion punch with which he kills the first traitor (which would come to be parodied many times by comedy star Stephen Chiau, most notably in *Fist of Fury 1991* parts I and II)? These are the reasons why *Fist of Fury* is a kung fu classic.

But what has been the legacy of *Fist of Fury*, other than a number of imitations varying wildly in quality? If anything, the film popularized the legend of Chen Zhen and his fallen master, giving rise to at least two "official" sequels, a remake, and a story of the youth of Hao Yuen Chia.

The sequels that followed arrived in the late 1970's, during the height of the Bruce Lee impersonator craze, where Lee look alike with ludicrous monikers fought it out to try and replace the fallen king of kung fu. Thus, *Fist of Fury II* and *New Fist of Fury* were delivered to a Lee hungry public, starring Bruce Li and Jackie Chan, respectfully, both as Chen's brothers. Both are cheap rip-offs, abysmal films serving to taint the image of a classic, rather than embellish it. The pluses of *Fist of Fury II* are few, in fact, almost none, until the slam-bang fight finale, which delivers the chop-socky goods in spades. For although Bruce Li may be shameless, he's no slouch when it comes to fighting, and so the final battle in an atmospheric rainstorm is pretty damn good. However, *Fist of Fury II* is just a bad, laughable movie, nothing more or less, but *New Fist of Fury* is that and more: namely, a tremendous waste of talent. With Lo Wei

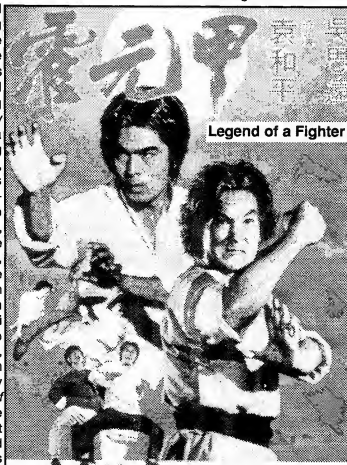
returning as director, along with Nora Miao back as the love interest (she co-starred in the original), not to mention a reservoir of (as yet) untapped talent in a young upstart named Jackie Chan, you have what should have been a winner - a worthy and legitimate follow up to a classic. What you get instead is an abomination, a film bad in every way that it's predecessor was good, leading one to wonder if Bruce Lee had anything to do with the directing of the two pictures he made with Lo Wei, since only the ones he made with Lee seemed to be of any real, lasting value! The only real reason to watch *New Fist of Fury* is to see a young Jackie Chan perform a few good acrobatic moves, as well as embarrass himself when trying to ape Lee's fighting style and intensity. The true worth of the picture lies in that perhaps it's failure was what gave Jackie the brainstorm to change his style, a refinement that

has since graced the cinema with several action classics.

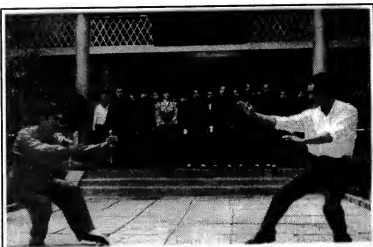
In 1980, a true successor arrived, sort of, in the form of a "prequel." *Legend of a Fighter* chronicles not the adventures of Chen Zhen, but rather the early years of his teacher Hao Yuen Chia. Directed by the very talented Yuen Woo-ping, the film begins with Yuen Chia as a young boy dying to learn martial arts but his father refuses to teach him, viewing him as a weakling. Instead, he hires a Japanese teacher (Shoji Karata) to tutor Hung, unaware that he has actually come there to spy on Hung's father, in order to learn his much envied kung fu techniques, including his death strike, "Flowers in a Storm". Feeling sorry for the young boy, the teacher agrees to teach Yuen Chia martial arts behind the

closed doors of the study room, unbeknownst to Hao's father. A strong bond forms between the two, teacher and student...a bond that will be tested when the teacher reveals his true identity and challenges Hao to a duel years later. The film is hurt slightly by a number of ridiculous subtitles, not to mention an ill-advised comic fight on a boat (involving a Simon Yuen styled character who pops into the flick for one scene, only to disappear for the rest of the movie...thank God...), but for the most part, *Legend of a Fighter* is outstanding. For the action fan, there's plenty of well staged brawls, including a show stopper with an Eagle Claw stylist, all made doubly great by the proud, stoic performance of Leung Kar-yan (Liang Chia Ren) of Thundering Mantis fame. This is his best film to date featuring what is probably his most impressive fighting with very few stunt dou-

bles. Surprisingly, what really sets this film apart is the tremendous performance of Shoji Karata (*Heroes of the East*) as the Japanese teacher whom befriends Hao. Karata gives what will probably always be his best performance here, perhaps relishing the opportunity to play something more than just another cardboard cut-out Japanese bad guy, for he shows a warmth, charisma, and cunning that haven't been present in his other films. His final duel with Hao is top-notch, ranking among the best scenes Yuen Woo-ping has ever put on the screen, not only because of the spectacular fighting (although some annoying editing techniques occasionally rear their heads) going on, but because of the volatile emotional content fueling the scene. As teacher and student square off, Hao resists hitting with full force, until his former friend and teacher insults him and his race, sending Hao into a frenzy, as



he literally beats Karata to death. but by the end of the sequence, it becomes clear that Karata had sacrificed his own and his student, a brilliant twist on the genre, flying in the face of the bare knuckled patriotism of films like *Fist of Fury* and Jimmy Wang Yu's *The Chinese Boxer*, offering up a more complex relationship between the stereotypical Japanese bad guy and the Chinese hero. Even though it may appear to be a battle between nations, it's really a test of wills between teacher and student, and in the end, Karata is still the teacher. Near the films close, there is a hunting final shot as Hao strolls stoically away from his "victory" in slow motion, flags waving patriotically waving in the background, as he ponders his teacher's final, fatal lesson. It is a wonderful close, to an equally good film.



Chin Siu-ho and Jet Lee face off in Yuen Woo-ping's *Fist of Legend*.

More frustrating (and intriguing) is the recent *Fist of Legend*, this time out starring Jet Lee as Chen Zhen, making this the fifth historical hero the Jet has essayed in the past two years. A reworking as well as a tribute to *Fist of Fury*, this new film takes a quieter, somber road under the hand of writer / director Gordon Chan, occasionally exploding into violent action during the movies' many fight sequences, which were directed by the aftermentioned Yuen Woo-ping. In this version, Chen has been sent to Japan to study at school (so he can gain their knowledge, so China won't fall behind), when he receives word of his teacher's death during a duel with a rival Japanese master. Frustrated and confused, he heads back to Shanghai to pay his respects. As he gets on the boat to leave, Chen's Japanese girlfriend, Miskio, bluntly asks him: "Chen, do you hate the Japanese?" After a long silence, he responds: "I'm not sure...being in this era, we have no choice." Already, this film is considerably different. In *Fist of Fury*, the Japanese characters exist only as the token bad guys, nothing more or less, while *Fist of Legend* makes a valiant attempt to address the rivalry between the Chinese and Japanese on historical terms, with many direct references to historical events ala Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* (Although not to the degree of that film).. As the film continues, Chen returns home and sets out to uncover the mystery of his masters death, proceeding to fight the Japanese with a vengeance. But when he enters back into a romance with Mitsuko, who arrives in China just in time to save Chen from a fabricated murder charge, the Chinese turn against him as well as the Japanese, and he suddenly finds himself fighting racism from both sides. If this sounds like an interesting concept, it is, but director Chan just doesn't have the guts to stick with it, as in the last thirty minutes, he simply has Mitsuko leave Chen to save his embarrassment, and with that, she is out of the movie, and so is the conflict. This is disappointing, since we've never really seen one of these movies that was mature enough to admit that the hatred on both sides is inexcusable. From there the film finishes up with a predictable, but lengthy and exciting, ten minute battle royale with a vicious Japanese general, actually played by Chinese actor Billy Chow, a Samo Hung protege from dozens of action films like *Pedicab Driver* and *Eastern Condors*. Despite these flaws, *Fist of Legend* still remains a fun, lively action film, and has much to recommend: For starts, Jet Lee's subdued performance is excellent, managing also to throw in a few vintage Bruce Lee touches while still maintaining his own style. A

good example of this comes while Jet is warming up, proceeding to do Bruce Lee's famous two-fingered push ups with the greatest of ease, then going Lee one better by performing one armed pull-ups (with the help of a little wirework no doubt)! Another plus is the extended cameo of Shoji Kurata (how long has it been since we last saw his guy?) as one of Chen's former teachers from Japan, who comes to Shanghai to test the young man's skills in what is probably the best fight sequence in the film: After a comic warm-up from Kurata (in a slight ribbing of *Legend of a Fighter*), the two boys brutally duke it out for a while before the Jet realizes that the wind is getting in the old man's eyes, so, not wanting to take advantage of him, the fighters whip out blindfolds and continue their brawl without the benefit of sight, an especially helpful sense when you're flipping and somersaulting to avoid attacks! On the down side, the movie is hampered by a mediocre soundtrack, and far too much time is spend on a subplot involving Jet Lee's *Tai Chi Master* co-star Chin Siu-ho's relationship with a young brothel girl, that ultimately goes nowhere. Oh well, at least they have a nifty fight scene together. That said, *Fist of Legend* is not a bad film at all...in fact, it's an above average action movie that occasionally displays some intelligence, and even a little melodramatic resonance, but it's not really the classic that was expected.

All the films discussed here are available on video, with varying degrees of quality: *Fist of Fury* a.k.a. *The Chinese Connection* is available in as a nice, widescreen, English dubbed version from Fox Home Video, which should be, along with English dubbed copies of *Fist of Fury II* and *New Fist of Fury*, very easy to find in just about any mom and pop or chain video store. you'll probably need to venture into a Chinese store to find the other two: *Legend of a Fighter* is available in a shoddily cropped version on World Video, but there's a lovely letterboxed version out on an extremely rare, out-of-print Hong Kong disc. Happy hunting. Just about any self-respecting Chinese video store should carry *Fist of Legend* as a new release Mandarin language tape, which has been letterboxed at around 1.66:1 ratio, and is of average quality.

-Joey OByran

Full Length Reviews

Rumble in the Bronx 紅番區

Released: 1995

Director: Stanley Tong

Stars: Jackie Chan, Anita Mui, Yip Fong-wah, Bill Tung

Version: Cantonese / English

Jackie Chan's latest film, *Rumble in the Bronx*, proves too uneven to achieve "masterwork" status, but in the end triumphs as one of his stronger pictures. A handsome, slickly directed and edited contemporary picture set "obviously" in the United States, the film's apparent reach for crossover appeal meets with limited artistic success, frustrated chiefly by an unfocused and redundant grab bag of a storyline. Ultimately, though, the movie's flaws are surmounted by the two fundamental merits that make Jackie Chan the top draw in Hong Kong cinema: the enduring appeal of the stars still boyish persona; and the uncommon energy and grace of his action set pieces. Both qualities are on fine display here.

Rumble in the Bronx begins as a fish out of water story. We are thrust immediately into New York City where Jackie's character, a visiting Hong Kong cop, soon becomes embroiled in ongoing conflict with a punk motorcycle gang that harasses his immigrant uncle's grocery store. After his uncle (Jackie's recurring father figure [the actor who played his captain from the *Project A* movies and from the *Police Story* films]) takes off for a two week honeymoon, Jackie feels obliged to help the store's new owner, played by the wonderfully multifaceted Anita Mui. The film spends its first half with this relatively naturalistic urban conflict, alternating between face offs with the motorcycle gang, led by a "Rock and roll" chanting American actor and his car-jumping "good / bad girl" companion (the beautiful but undistinguished Yip Fong-wah in her motion picture debut) on the one hand and Jackie's formation of an ambiguous relationship with Mui on the other.

Then, suddenly, at the film's midpoint an apparent subplot is introduced involving diamonds and organized crime. Soon this larger scale, more melodramatic plot eclipses the smaller conflict. In fact, it winds up taking over the movie entirely, culminating in an insane, spectacular sea/land chase with a hovercraft. The filmmakers cap the film with a rather silly coda that leaves behind any remaining sense of reality. The setting of the film in New York (though much of it was shot in Vancouver, B.C.) naturally conveys that the producers intend this film as a crossover, helping to bring Jackie to a larger Western audience. While this may or may not be the intention, at the very least the film is a test of whether Jackie Chan can make a bonafide Jackie Chan movie outside Hong Kong, as he may inevitably be forced to do come 1997. Those who are worried that this film will be a nineties version of his watered, down American films of

the eighties, *The Big Brawl* and *The Protector*, can rest assured that Jackie's persona and talents are in far stronger evidence in *Rumble*. While Jackie's occasional English readings prove that he remains no threat to Shakespearean thespians, his own peculiar capabilities are undiluted in this outing to American shores. For instance, any North American union supervision of the stunt work is invisible, Jackie does things here that are just as outrageously dangerous as in his typical HK work. In fact, the outtakes at the end of the picture make clear that Jackie spent much of the production performing stunts in a cleverly, disguised leg cast acquired after a long jump onto a moving hovercraft. One can only wonder how much further he might have gone with the final demolition derby chase had all his limbs been fully operational. Additionally, the mix of streetfighting technique versus Jackie's kung fu is so terrifically choreographed, shot and edited, with liberal amounts of baseball bat, wielding opponents, that we rarely miss the presence of more skilled martial artist foes. A battle in the gangs warehouse hangout is particularly inventive; Jackie's newfound uses of snow skis and refrigerators here makes this fight one for the highlight reel.

All of this, though, is not to say that there are no differences between *Rumble* and Chan's usual HK film. For one thing, the new film is far more concerned with matters of political correctness than the typical HK picture. More significantly, knowledgeable Jackie Chan followers will notice in *Rumble in the Bronx* a relative dearth of the broad comedy associated with his style, perhaps in order to appeal more to Western audiences. This more serious approach might also be accounted for by Chan's collaborators. Tone wise, the picture most resembles his earlier *Police Story III: Supercop* which *Rumble*'s director, Stanley Tong, also directed. *Rumble* is similarly much more hard-edged and violent than a picture such as his last, much more comic effort, *Drunken Master II*. (If rated by the MPAA, *Rumble* would probably receive an "R" rating for the villains violence and harsh language) Another similarity between the two



Jackie Chan tries out his new sneakers in *Rumble in the Bronx*.

collaborations with Tong is that like *Supercop*, *Rumble in the Bronx* puts more emphasis on performance and character than the star's films of the earlier movies. Depending upon one's preference, this is either a plus for the film or an obstacle in getting to the main attraction: namely, seeing Jackie in action. This more dramatic orientation may give the film more of a "quality" sheen to Western eyes; but it also decreases the pure entertainment value of the film as opposed to, for instance, *The Project A* films, in which pace, action and comedy are everything. Often, as in scenes between Jackie, a local handicapped boy and love interest [Yip Fong-wah], the character moments come across as fairly maudlin tedious. Other moments, such as an amusingly cross cultural wedding and Anita Mui's monologue despairing over her plight, have a stronger emotional tug.

It may be most instructive to diehard fans of Chan to say that those who split into the subgroup that loved *Supercop* will likely love this film, while those disappointed by that picture may feel the same towards this latest. It will no doubt be interesting to see how well the latest film performs commercially, as *Supercop* performed poorly in Asian markets. What may set the new film a notch above for fans, however, is that *Rumble* departs from *Supercop* in that Jackie does not hand off the wildest stunts to his co-star, but handles them all himself. While we may never again see the kind of non-stop insanity and danger displayed in, say, the motorcycle / Fiat chase from *Armour of God II*, the set pieces in *Rumble* have a consistent quality that *Supercop* lacked until it's spectacular, terrific finale. Indeed, whether or not the new film is as lean as one might hope for it to be, there is no doubt that Chan and company deliver when the action set-pieces arrive. A pursuit through a parking structure, the aforementioned warehouse battle and the climactic chase all have the kind of kinetic flair, athleticism, invention and derring do that keep Jackie's fans coming back one more time to catch, all of the lightning-fast, astonishing moments that they missed the first time around. Even when he repeats a gag that we may have seen before he finds a new and improved spin on it.

While the movies clichéd depiction of the street gang has a decidedly anachronistic feel, technically the film is entirely up, to date, the star's best yet, and looks and sounds as good or better than any medium, budget Hollywood movie. Particular kudos to the cinematographer, who brings rich contrast and texture to the Bronx backdrop. -Keith Putman

The Best Songs For Jackie Chan's Super Motion Pictures & The Others

While most avid HK music listeners pan the efforts of Chan's singing career, this novel soundtrack is worth the money. It not only contains the songs from *Rumble in the Bronx* and portions of the score, but it has songs from *Drunken Master II*, *Crime Story*, *Police Story III*, *Super Cop*, *Twin Dragons*, and Jackie's rendition of the Wong Fei-hong theme song from *Once Upon a Time in China II*. Most of the songs have a catchy rock base, and if you can't understand Cantonese (Jackie sings better in Mandarin), that's okay because you will find yourself singing right along anyways. The only annoying tracks out of the thirteen feature Carrie Cain Speaks who can't sing in English or Cantonese. So go figure. If anything, I would recommend picking this one up as *Rumble in the Bronx* may hold the title for the highest grossing film in Hong Kong history for a while. The soundtrack is available from Rock Records.

-Clyde Gentry III

How Deep Is Your Love? 女子公寓

Released: 1994

Director: Andy Chin

Stars: Charlie Yeung, Benny Mok Siu-chung, Wu Sien-lien

Version: Mandarin / Letterboxed

Very few male directors can fully capture the feelings of women in film without getting overly dramatic. The realism and strength is usually exchanged for a sign of weakness at which the male lead would be set to conquer. So, needless to say, I have been following the career of Andy Chin, a fast working director these days that has been getting due credit for making intelligent films centered around strong female characters.

Chin's newest effort, *How Deep Is Your Love?*, tackles a conglomerate of tough issues -- homosexuality, drugs, and racism, but instead of passing judgement on them, he merely presents an objective view. Chin's star actress this time out is Charlie Yeung, a young, upcoming pop singer who Joey O'Bryan (fellow HKFC writer) described her best when he said, "She has the innocence of Anita Yuen, but the maturity and charisma of Anita Mui." Yeung has played it smart when it comes to her film roles in Tsui Hark's *The Lovers* and *What Price Survival*, and with this film and the upcoming Wong Kar-wai picture, she has the world in her hands.

Yeung plays a hard working medical student who is called away from her studies in America to oversee the death of her brother in Hong Kong. What she finds is a run down hotel swarming with multiple personalities and lifestyles - a homeless musician (Wu Sien-lien), a spiteful lesbian couple, a five year old girl who answers the hotel phone lines, and the hotel's superintendent (Benny Mok). Yeung can't seem to find anything about her brother, and the only one willing to help is the popular Mok who takes the time to show her around. Here, a brief reference to the odor of Hong Kong's Indian district is seen as natural reflexion, and it doesn't make any excuses. Call it a gamble to create controversy, but Chin's point is well taken showing that racism is, dare I say, normal.

Eventually, Yeung becomes aware that Mok may be a straight acting homosexual surrounded by mostly feminine types. She becomes comfortable with the thought, and nevertheless uses Mok to find out more about her brother. And upon visiting her brother's grave, she begins to have doubt's about his sexuality as well.

Wu Sien-lien's character is the film's main problem. She isn't given enough room to round herself out, so she becomes an irritating, pretentious obstacle that we've seen a hundred times before. Wu's only purpose is to serve as Yeung's comforting friend, but otherwise, she's wasted.

Director Chin is smart to keep the relationship between Yeung and Mok confusing, and that confusion adds to the realism. The two glide back and forth about sharing their affections, until a twist makes this film even more of a splendid surprise. *How Deep Is Your Love?* isn't on the level of *Love Among the Triads*, but it is worth a night's viewing. Charlie Yeung is indeed an endearing actress with a bright future. -Clyde Gentry III

Don't Give a Damn 冇面俾

Released: 1995

Director: Sammo Hung

Starring: Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, Takeshiro Kaneshiro, Chow Hui-mei, Ngai Sing

Version: Cantonese

During the mid-eighties, Sammo Hung and his Hung Kar-pan (stunt team) led the modern day kung fu genre with films like *Dragons Forever* and *Meals on Wheels*. Sammo started showing signs of slowing down by the end of 1991, and he moved out of the limelight and went on to direct (*Moon Warriors*) and choreograph (*The Eagles Shooting Heroes*). And without Sammo, Yuen Biao didn't have much of a leg to stand on, tripping over himself with films like *Deadful Melody* and *Kickboxer*. His only bright moment in the past few years came from his directorial debut in *A Kid from Tibet*.

After his amazing choreography in Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time*, Sammo was primed for a return. And while *Don't Give a Damn* isn't Sammo's best effort even by a long shot, it shows that the 45-year old superstar still has what it takes to bring his brand of action to the silver screen once again. All of Sammo's tricks are back in fine form.

Sammo plays an aging Hong Kong detective who gets hooked up with customs official Yuen Biao to thwart a motley band of Chinese and African American bad guys. Takeshiro Kaneshiro plays Sammo's young and crafty superior -- displaying some amazing martial arts skills thanks to some cleverly placed stunt doubles. The beginning of the film is not much different than any other Sammo flick, setting up a series of comedic sequences revolved around romantic subplots. Sammo is quite the ladies man playing for the affections of pop singer Chow Hui-mei while trying to fend off a fellow female officer.

By the time *Don't Give a Damn* reaches the middle, it's not hard to see that the film just doesn't have a script, with the bad guys bombing the police station to raid the evidence locker! But that's okay because Sammo's films work off the characters and usually not the stories, with few exceptions. It brought back old memories to see Sammo (with a ponytail) and Yuen (with a goatee) together again. They have great chemistry together especially when it comes to comedy. In one scene, Yuen is trying to impress a girl that likes him with flowers, and when he surprises her, he learns that she was just playing a joke. Instead of walking back with his head between his legs, Yuen shoves the flowers in his mouth and chomps away claiming he loves the taste. When he happens on Sammo, he sprays a stream of red petals through the air.

Things start cooking when an inner conflict rages on between the head Chinese bad guys and their brothers who do the dirty work. When Sammo captures one of them who happens to be African American, they in turn, kidnap Sammo's girl. Of course, this sets up the climax as a switch, and it just happens to be near a run down house (primo fight locale).



While many Hong Kong films are terribly stereotypical of Americans and African Americans, *Don't Give a Damn* really steps over the line. To make the hostage exchange, Yuen Biao and Takeshiro Kaneshiro dress up in black face, complete with afro caps. While there is at least a point to this and moderately funny one at that, the conversation that ensues is one of the most racist lines of dialogue I have ever heard (Uh, make that seen). If this one scene had not been in the film, I think it probably would have been a much more memorable experience.

As with every Sammo Hung action picture, the end delivers the goods with different groups of characters fighting in a frenzy. Sammo has adopted the Wong Kar-wai slow motion style to set up the action, but once it gets going, Sammo is wise enough to keep it flowing with the old style. While Sammo throws the usual kicks and punches, Yuen Biao manages to do some of the acrobatic tricks for which he is best known. Yuen's fight with a couple of Americans is amazing, although he can't fight them off by himself.

Probably the best fight is when Sammo faces off against Ngai Sing (an old protege of Sammo during the eighties who can be seen in *Slickers vs. Killers*, *Encounter of Spooky Kind II*, and *Lover's Tear*) and the African American who was betrayed by the other bad guys. A three way melee of fists and feet make this a really intense fight to watch. Sammo makes good use of an aerial shot in this sequence -- a trademark so ever present in his action set pieces.

Sammo's latest effort won't disappoint fans, and it's a sure sign that everyone's favorite big man is back to business. Watch for cameos by Wu Ma, Richard Ng, Leung Kar-yan, Blacky Ko, Damian Lau and Chin Siu-ho. -Clyde Gentry III

Red Rose, White Rose 紅玫瑰·白玫瑰

Released: 1994

Director: Stanley Kwan

Stars: Joan Chen, Winston Chiao, Veronica Yip

Version: Mandarin / Letterboxed

"Zhen-bao has two women in his life, one is his white rose, the other is his red rose. Perhaps every man has two such women...at least two. The red rose eventually becomes no more than the splattered blood stain of a mosquito on the wall. The white rose shines in the dark. After marriage, the white rose is no more than a grain of rice that sticks to your shirt," says the narrator in comparing the two women that share a common bond.

This quote is taken from the new Stanley Kwan film, an elegant tapestry of lush photography and blissful words excised from the Eileen Chang novel of the same name. Before Wong Kar-wai's amazing *Chung King Express*, Stanley Kwan was the meaning of Hong Kong art house with his acclaimed *Rouge*. And like his former masterpiece, *Red Rose, White Rose* is a further demonstration of the art of subtlety, although less cerebral viewers would call it boredom. The film had divided reviews with Taiwan taking to it and Hong Kong panning it, but there is no denying that Kwan has not lost his touch of grace. The three leads should also be commended for perfectly representing three extremes: one of no control, one of balance, and one of too much control.

The film centers around Zhen-bao (Winston Chiao of Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet*), a handsome businessman with a reign for becoming the model of a modern man in China. His outward persona has wisdom and poise and shows no signs of vulnerability. After studying in Edinburgh, Scotland, Zhen-bao returns to Shanghai to stay with some friends where he meets his red rose (Joan Chen), a married woman whose husband is away on business. Upon their first meeting, she displays an unpredictability for being outspoken, and she always seems to catch Zhen-bao off guard with her poetic words. With her, Zhen-bao has all that he could want except their relationship is immoral -- so he pushes her away when they are anywhere in sight. There is a passion both mental and physical between them, one that is very delicate yet unstable. When the red rose wants to end her marriage to be with Zhen-bao, he denounces the thought because it would stain his sainthood.

As time passes, Zhen-bao becomes more and more prominent among his colleagues, and to round out his perfect image, he must have the perfect wife -- his white rose (Veronica Yip). Perfectly poised at all times, the white rose is a demure woman, quaint and common to the letter. She exemplifies the perfect Chinese woman, one that will answer to Zhen-bao's beckon call. He plays affectionate at first, until their union, in which he demonstrates a sheer control beating any life within her stale mind. He spends his money on prostitutes and enjoys their company while he has sex with his white rose only for children -- no pleasure to be felt. Even when she becomes aware of his adultery, she protects him at all costs. Zhen-bao is her God.



Joan Chen and Winston Chiao star in *Red Rose, White Rose*.

Stanley Kwan's vision is translated in fine form with the help of Christopher Doyle as cinematographer. His photography is just as vivid and powerful as his work on *Ashes of Time*. When the red rose is telling Zhen-bao about her innocence in college, the camera pans across her and then fades to an earlier shot of Zhen-bao with an innocent woman. The shot then fades back to the red rose. Strong images are put to good use with the rain, textured walls, spiraled staircases, and beautiful scenery. Many of the feelings evoked are handled with physical gestures namely the hands. When Zhen-bao first meets the red rose, she is just getting out of the shower with her hands and hair still soapy. After they shake hands, a shot of Zhen-bao gliding his finger slowly over his now soapy hand is well meaning even though it only lasted a couple of seconds. The look of *Red Rose, White Rose* is a truly amazing sight, and attention was given in other aesthetic areas as well. This is also one of the few films shot with spectral recording, and the score is absolutely magnificent. And the subtitles in Chinese films rarely show signs of proper diction and syntax, but *Red Rose, White Rose* is completely flawless. The narrator's words will make any viewer wanting to go and check out the original novel (it can easily be found in English here in America). The only problem is when the film puts up actual quotes from the book -- the lettering both Chinese and English is written with an awkward script making it difficult to read. This shortcoming, however, does not take anything away from the film, and the characterizations are the real wonders here, not the story.

It's great to see Joan Chen in another Chinese movie (her last was the Clara Law film *Temptation of a Monk*), especially when her American roles are flat and politically correct. She is not given any range whatsoever. Of course, when your leading men are Christopher Lambert (*The Hunted*) and Steven Seagal (*On Deadly Ground*), you would be more appreciative of roles that yield experience rather than a pay check. Veronica Yip, a former level III actress, does a fantastic job as well, and her icy presence comes across with a gestured maturity. Winston Chiao is good, and he too, shows more dramatic diversity than his role in *The Wedding Banquet*. I recommend that anyone who wants to see this film, go and get the Mandarin version -- it was shot synch sound in Mandarin. For fans of Wong Kar-wai, *Red Rose, White Rose* will truly mesmerize you.

-Clyde Gentry III

The Chinese Feast 金玉滿堂

Released: 1995

Director: Tsui Hark

Stars: Leslie Cheung, Chung Han-to, Anita Yuen, Law Kar-ying, Cheu Man-check, Xin Xin Xiong

Version: Mandarin / Cropped

The Chinese Feast was a big winner in the Chinese New Year, and it probably is one of the better kung fu movies to come out, that is if you substitute the kung fu for food. You see, Tsui Hark has combined the framework and the story of a kung fu movie with that of food. And the result is an excellent dish of odd characters, breathtaking food preparation scenes, and plenty of laughs.

The story opens with a show down between two master chefs. One is a young, crafty newcomer (Cheu Man-check) and the other is a veteran (Chung chun-to). As the competition goes on, Chung's mind is not focused, due to a pregnant wife in labor in the hospital with complications. Chung decides to stick it out, but loses on all accounts. The good natured Cheu follows his competitor back to the hospital, but it's too late.

The story jumps ahead five years where Tsui Hark mixes several subplots of various light-hearted tones. One concerns Leslie Cheung as an eager go-getter who just can't seem to



Anita Yuen, Chung Chun-to & Leslie Cheung star in *The Chinese Feast*.

make the cooking thing work at cooking school. He meets up with Cheu Man-check who refers him to his master's kitchen. The master (Law Kar-ying) is an outspoken little man who not only must contend with Cheung's screw ups but that of his daughter (Anita Yuen). As the film progresses, Yuen becomes more unpredictable both mentally (fighting over who sings with the microphone at a club) and physically (red hair, green lip stick, gold and silver shiny things on her face).

When an evil chef (Xin Xin Xiong) comes to town to prove he is the best, a challenge is made to Law to enter the Qing & Han Imperial Feast - an age old event that has only been celebrated twice before. If Law loses, Xin takes his restaurant and his sign board (breaking the signboard of a kung fu school is a sign of defeat).

When Law has a heart attack because no one will help him prepare for the banquet, Yuen and Cheung must go and find the real master (Chung) and bring him out of retirement. But he will need a little coaxing since Chung has withdrawn from society -- drunk and depressed from losing his wife. So Yuen and Cheung come up with a clever scheme to patch things up between the once loving couple, and bring them back to prepare for the ultimate competition.

As in any good kung fu movie, Chung must go through a training session because he has lost his five senses to alcohol, and can't bring feeling to preparing the food like he did before. Cheu Man-check brings him up to speed, and everything points to the climactic cook off between the Super Power team (Xin Xin Xiong and crew) and the Chung's team. While the dishes they prepare aren't anything that one in America would be subject to (bear claw, elephant trunk, monkey brain), Tsui creates the same kind of kinetic energy in the food fu as he does with the kung fu in the *Once Upon a Time in China* films. The food is pulled, needed, stuffed, and thrown around with graceful ease. Cooking aficionados will definitely appreciate the time put into these sequences.

This is one of Tsui Hark's best films, and it's good to see Tsui leave the action and concentrate more on drama and comedy. After all, his success is contingent on upon these types of films as in *The Lovers*. Tsui takes a gamble with the *Once Upon a Time in China* films since Hong Kong remains so volatile towards them -- Taiwan is probably the only sure thing. Fans of Tsui's style of filmmaking need not worry, because all of his trademarks are present, minus the political allegory. One of the best scenes is one involving a critic tasting a dish in the cook off. Tsui has visions of clay animated colors and food dancing around the critic's head to visualize his tastebuds. A mouth watering sight to say the least. Even a fight between Cheung and a giant fish comes across as amusing instead of drifting into absurdity.

All of the acting is top notch, and the characterizations are very defined and well thought out. Chung Chun-to does a splendid job, and seems to carry every scene he is in. The subplot involving him and his wife is endearing and played serious amongst the erratic escapades of Yuen and Cheung. Leslie Cheung is handsome and playful as always working in a romantic interlude with Anita Yuen no doubt. The biggest surprise in *The Chinese Feast* acting wise, is that Tsui finds room for his two kung fu stars: Cheu Man-check (doing Jet Lee one better with stylish hair) and Xin Xin Xiong (a competition fighter who played Club Foot in *Once Upon a Time in China* parts three through five). Cheu, especially, has turned out to be a fine actor with a very graceful presence. Law Kar-ying is popping up everywhere lately, and he does a fine job here as well. It will be interesting to see if this great bit player does become something more.

While fans of Tsui Hark's other films may not be up for a film like this, it remains a pleasant little gem that moves quickly and although it's predictable, it has charm and originality. After all, who else could make a film about food out of a kung fu movie.

-Clyde Gentry III

My Father is a Hero 給爸爸的信

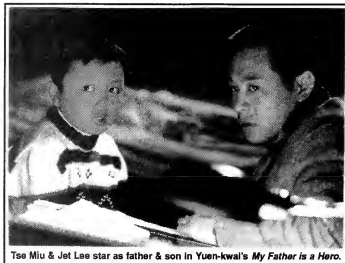
Released: 1995

Director: Corey Yuen-kwai

Stars: Jet Lee, Tse Miu, Anita Mui, Blacky Ko, Yu Rong-guang

Version: Cantonese

Jet Lee's new modern day films got off on the wrong start with *Bodyguard from Beijing* -- a great little gem that worked because of the relationship, not the action. With *My Father is a Hero*, Corey Yuen-kwai still uses the relationships to hold the film together, but he pulls out all the stops in the action department even moving into Jackie Chan territory.



Tse Miu & Jet Lee star as father & son in Yuen-kwai's *My Father is a Hero*.

Lee plays a mainland China cop who must befriend an inmate (Blacky Ko) in a mainland prison, and break out only to land in Hong Kong to infiltrate a group of hoods led by Yu Rong-guang. The only problem is that he has a son (Tse Miu) involved in a Wu Shu tournament and a wife who is on her death bed -- both of which don't know he is an undercover agent.

Lee and the group's first mission is steal a bunch of explosives from some European dealers at a large windowed restaurant. When things go haywire, Hong Kong detective Anita Mui (who just happens to be there with her detective boyfriend Damian Lau) gets involved creating a stunt-filled extravaganza of guns and car crashes. Look fast, or you will miss director Corey Yuen-kwai as a bartender. While Lee manages to escape, Mui follows a lead from the Hong Kong government to go to the mainland to investigate him.

There she finds a child who will do anything to defend his father's honor even if he knows little of what his father is really doing. When Mui follows the youngster home one day, she sees that Lee may not be the one she's truly after. Corey Yuen-kwai handles the drama with grace and poise adding only slight bits of humor for balance. In endearing scene, Mui looks on as the boy listens to his mother's final words. With no where else to go, Mui decides to take the boy with her to Hong Kong to find Lee only the boy ends up in the very group that Lee has joined.

Yuen Kwai's attention to drama is especially felt in a scene where Yu Rong-guang beats the boy to a pulp while Lee looks

on motionless because he can't do anything about it. When Lee's identity is finally blown, an amazing fight matches Lee's skills not only against Yu Rong-guang, but Ngai Sing and Lo Wai-kwong as well. This fight in the rain is topped by an incredible stunt where Lee scurries over a scaffolding that is being destroyed by a dump truck. This sequence is any bit as good as anything one would find in a Jackie Chan movie.

The film's climax is set at an underground auction on board an oil tanker. Yu and the gang set up explosive charges around the ship as to blackmail the rich participants, but Lee is always one step ahead. And when the final fireworks go off, the end of *My Father is a Hero* explodes in a frenzy of some of Jet Lee's best fighting to date. Humor is expertly woven into the stream of action, as in one scene where the three villains hold up their legs in reference to Lo Wai-kwong's showy reference in *Drunken Master II*. Another sequence uses Yu's baggy jacket as a device for hiding his hand movements only to strike Lee at the last second. Tse Miu finally joins in to fight alongside his father using ropes. The crowd will surely go wild when Lee wraps the rope around Tse and slings him out to kick the bad guys in yo yo style. Yuen's choreography is amazing, but he still can't pull it off without showing some wires. If Yuen-kwai really wanted to be the best, he would take a hint or two from Yuen Woo-ping. Although Corey Yuen-kwai may not win in 1994 compared to Jackie's amazing *Drunken Master II* scenes, he will definitely be a shoe in for this film. Yuen is smart to mix and match Lee's fighting style with tai-chi and street fighting.

My Father is a Hero is the definitive Hong Kong film for 1995 - better than *Rumble in the Bronx* and *God of Gamblers Returns*. It works on just about every level it attempts to succeed at and shows that director Corey Yuen-kwai has graduated to a different level of filmmaking. Yuen was an understudy of Sammo Hung who made quite a name for himself in the eighties with films like *Yes*, *Madam* and *Righting Wrongs (Above the Law)*. Now, he has revealed a maturity that only one other director that dabbles in the fu has reached in our time -- Tsui Hark.

The film does have three problems, even if they are only minor gripes. The main problem is that once Anita Mui and Tse Miu reach Hong Kong, the script doesn't know what to do with Mui, and she disappears for the last fourth of the film only to show up with guns ablazing in the end. And while Yu Rong-guang plays his villain to the utmost of eccentricity, he goes overboard, although the script is probably at fault here. Yu wears shades the entire movie, even at night, and has a funny twitch to his head in whatever he's doing. If Yu had acted more fierce, he probably would have made for a better



Don't Mess with Tse Miu!

villain. As it stands, he's just okay. The story also starts to lose solidarity toward the end, but the action more than makes up for it. The bad guys don't have any real intentions, and whatever they were, is fizzled out. But hey, whose complaining. Like *God of Gamblers' Returns*, Yuen-kwai tries to fill the screen with a little of everything, and overall, it works.

-Clyde Gentry III

Kung Fu Theater

Last Hurrah For Chivalry

Released: 1978

Director: John Woo

Stars: Wei Pai, Damian Lau

Version: Cantonese / Cropped

Most film critics point to 1987's *A Better Tomorrow* as the evolutionary film that transformed John Woo from a successful hack director of cheezy comedies and chop socky films into a masterful action auteur. Hipper critics and fans usually seem to bestow that honor upon his 1981 war epic *Heroes Shed No Tears* a.k.a. *Sunset Warrior*, but I'll place the winner as his 1978 swordplay actioner, *Last Hurrah for Chivalry*, a swell kung fu epic that still hasn't gotten its proper due.

Generally disliked by fans and a failure at the box office upon its initial release, this is the first film to fully explore Woo's pet themes of male bonding, brotherhood, and honor, and is long overdue for reevaluation. The plot follows two heroic swordsmen, played by Wei Pai and Damian Lau, as they are hired to kill a vicious martial arts master by a wealthy young nobleman, who has a few secret ambitions of his own. Sure, there's a few twists and turns, and a gratuitous romantic subplot, but *Last Hurrah For Chivalry* is mainly an excuse for lost of swordplay action sequences, mixed with the heroic melodrama that has become John Woo's trademark. You don't have to look far or hard to find the brazen Wooisms that clearly mark this as his first true signature piece: Freeze frames, wipes, slow motion are heavily deployed, and images of blood stained assassins fighting side by side against hordes of bad guys all point ahead to Woo's future masterpieces. The biggest difference is, of course, that our heroes fight with swords and kung fu, rather than the heavy artillery fans are used to. Surprisingly, Woo handles the martial arts action very well, and many of the set pieces are very memorable. The best action sequence comes toward the end, when our heroes storm the heavily guarded fortress of their targeted bad guy, played by Li Sheng-hai of Master Killer fame, where they must fight off tons of sword wielding villains, before they are trapped in a steel cage match (!), proceeding on into a hilariously outrageous battle against a swordsman utilizing the "sleeping sword" fighting style, before the final brutal showdown against Li in his candle filled chamber. Of course, that's only the first climax, with another slam bang finale directly following the first, as the film winds down to a typically tragic John Woo ending. John Woo has often been quoted as noting *One Armed Swordsman* director Chang Cheh as a major influence, and that influence is certainly and obviously present here, what with all the slashing swords and spurring blood on display. Woo has also claimed that his heroes in his "Heroic Bloodshed" pictures are

nothing more than modern day extensions of the ancient do-gooders of the historical martial arts genre. This observation is made very convincing by viewing *Last Hurrah for Chivalry*. In fact, some of the similarities are striking. For instance, John Woo himself had this to say about Damian Lau's character in the film: "When you see *A Better Tomorrow*, Chow Yen Fat's character is the same as the wandering monk in this film, the one who likes to drink. It's the same character."

Last Hurrah for Chivalry is a fine swordplay picture, an underrated action film that definitely gives the viewer his or her money's worth, at the same time allowing for a more stylized, unique treatment of the genre. But the film is so much more: It's a fascinating document of the blossoming talents of one of Hong Kong's most important filmmakers, chronicling a stage in his career where he was slowly obtaining a grasp of the elements that would help transform him into one of the world's most respected and talked about filmmakers. And for those reasons alone, it was a picture well worth remembering.

-Joey OBryan

Capsule Reviews

Whatever You Want...(1994)

Well, for once, I want a plot in a Wong Jing movie. That's not too much to ask! Anita Yuen plays a star struck advertising executive who wants to please her glamorous boss (Christy Chung). Stumbling through a dream sequence of the bus chase from *Speed* (with Law Kar-ying playing the Keanu Reeves character?!?) and a director who makes transvestite versions of Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* and *Chung King Express* are added for filler. Then, some nonsense involving pearls summons a magical genie who just happens to be the very manly Michael Wong with long hair and bare chest. Yuen tries to hook Wong and Chung up, but guess what -- Yuen and Wong end of falling in love with each other. This is definitely not one of Anita Yuen's better films, but then again, you can't make more than ten movies a year without a few of them being bad.

C.G.



Little Peter Pan (1994)

Wong Jing's production value adds slickness to this average action comedy featuring Lo Wai-king and Tse Miu. The two play father and son living in mainland China until news of their master on his death bed takes them to Hong Kong. When they get there, the two are separated because of mistaken identity caused by a murder committed by Hong Kong's top bad boy Ngai Sing. Here is the interesting thing: the subplot involving Tse Miu trying to find his father is completely goofy with the boy meeting up with Ng Man-tat. Some of the laughs work, some don't. To give you an idea, in one scene Tse is being taught how to throw a javelin. He throws it and impales Superman

who falls to the ground, and in a British accent, says, "Oh, shit," and then flies away. A fight also turns Tse Miu into Dragon ball Z (a character that I wish was never created). The plot with Lo Wai-kwong, however, is very serious, with a father trying desperately to find his son blinded by lime powder that he had been doused during a fight with Ngai Sing. The end of the film rejoins the two and it has a few good moves thrown in with better than average choreography. Pretty cute, and it has its moments. This film has not been released in Hong Kong, so the translated title is the only thing to work with here. You got me how they came up with it. C.G.

The Hunting List (1994)

Ray Liu stars in one of the meanest, bloodiest, exploitive action movies to come out in quite sometime.

The tone is very dark and uncaring with below par acting used to carry it along. Only the two male leads show any signs of acting prowess. Liu's character got in with the wrong crowd



as a triad underling at a very early age, and when he moved on -- he straightened himself out to become an undercover cop. When he returns to his hometown, he must infiltrate his old gang where he must become reacquainted with his best friend (newcomer Dan Lip-man) and his ex-girlfriend. The most interesting aspect about *The Hunting List* is the unlikeable, anti-protagonist, an undercover cop with little emotion. One scene has his character drinking beer in the rain while his friend rapes and kills a girl on top of a car next to him. The scene is a grueling reminder that Hong Kong can produce some of the most unspeakable characters of rage known to the cinematic world. But on a more shallow level, the two male leads work well together, and the gunplay sequences could teach John Woo a thing or two about squibs (the blood shoots everywhere!). Low budget exploitation fare served up with sex and violence, components that many people find interesting. I just liked a good anti-hero. C.G.

Two Shaolin Kids in Hong Kong (1994)

Lau Kar-fei (Liu Chia-hui) and Dik Siu-long (the little fat monk with glasses) reprise their roles from *Treasure Hunt* in this terribly constructed fish out of water story that could really test your ability to sit through Hong Kong's bottom of the barrel comedies. Two Shaolin kids get in trouble with the head monk, and after several ass beatings -- get mistakenly put into a box to be shipped to Hong Kong. They meet up with Ng Man-tat of course, and fumble through a bunch of painful comic set pieces. A brief fight between Lau and Phillip Kwok (the cab driver in *Treasure Hunt*) doesn't make this trash any easier to watch. This one's completely tasteless, and it makes the *Shaolin Popeye* films look great. Oh boy! C.G.

Mermaid Got Married (1994)

Clumsy mermaid tale has problems galore, despite a cast of young hopefuls. Borrowing from the American film, *Splash*, this 'tale' is set in a university with handsome Cheng Yee-kin yearning to make a name for himself as a teacher. Since childhood, Cheng has never been able to swim, and when he accidentally falls in the water teaching a PE class -- his mermaid / guardian (Christy Chung) is there to help him. The only problem is that the pearl she uses to save him is swallowed, and she must explore Hong Kong to find the pearl and confess her love for him. Forget finding logic at this point. How is it that she coincidentally speaks perfect Cantonese and can adjust to human life in one day by becoming a student at the university?



Kaneshiro Takeshi, Cheng Yee-kin, & Christy Chung in *Mermaid Gets Married*.

Isn't it a little corny for a principal, a teacher, a cop, and a witness to bond together to capture the mermaid for fame and fortune? And it's easy for them to build a large, electronically charged cage to go around a swimming pool to hold her at the drop of a hat? Nothing can rescue this fishy tale, and the special effects are nothing to get excited about. Kaneshiro Takeshi and Maggie Mak Kai Ki play a couple of romantic hopefuls who get involved, and some of their scenes are decent, but mixed with the rest of this nonsense -- who cares? Pop singer Cheng is very good, and after his last role in *A Return to A Better Tomorrow*, we should be seeing him again. Chung is captivating, but this role for her was a total wash out. She will be the one to watch in 1995, and although Clarence Ford produced this film, he cast her in his next big directing project for this year. Despite earlier reports, Kent Cheng is in this piece of trash, and I can't understand how he can even find roles. For the love of man, your career was great during the seventies and early eighties, but it's time to quit. C.G.

Lover's Lover (1994)

The latest film from veteran Shaw Brothers' director Li Han-hsiang demonstrates that even the greatest filmmakers can make third rate films. With the narrative structure of a 'forties' mystery, *Lover's Lover* opens with the discovery of a murdered young Chinese woman in Los Angeles. The plot continues with a series of flashbacks triggered by what several of her friends

and acquaintances say about the murder victim. A Beijing opera troupe tours the United States, and while the troupe performs in Los Angeles, one of the actresses disappears and becomes a kept woman of a rich overseas Chinese businessman (Tony Leung Kar-fai). His wife learns of the liaison, the actress' boyfriend comes searching for her, and the actress also offends a few other people. A potentially interesting mystery has been ruined by poor dubbing, substandard screenwriting and so-so direction. It is a pity that the great Li Han-hsiang has deteriorated to such a low level. Whatever happened to the magnificent director that created *Love Eterne*, which inspired Tsui Hark's *The Lovers*, and *Chinese Ghost Story* (1959) which inspired the Ching Siu-tung version. Known as the Cecil B. DeMille of Hong Kong in the fifties and sixties, Li introduced higher production values to filmmaking in Hong Kong through his thoroughly researched, lavishly photographed and competently directed spectacles such as *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Temple* (1975), both starring Lisa Lu, Ti Lung and David Chiang. It is a pity that only *Love Eterne* and his eighties films about the Empress Dowager -- *Burning of the Palace*, *Reign Behind the Curtain*, and the *Express Dowager* -- are available on laser disc or tape because his earlier works surpass his later ones. -Y.C.

Chinese Character Reference Guide

The Chinese characters to the right are to be used for the capsule reviews and the article on Cheezy HK Low Budget Action Directors.

Now, you don't have to be afraid to go into a Chinese video store.

Let us know what you think by writing to to our p.o. box or e-mail us (see page 2)

In an upcoming issue of HKFC, we will list the Cantonese, Mandarin, and American names for all your favorite Hong Kong stars and directors and list the characters as well. We will even try to get pictures too.

Happy Hunting!

Chinese Characters

Latest Vengeance

報仇

21 Red List

21 紅色名單

Martial Arts Dream

新鴛鴦蝴蝶夢

Lover's Lover

情人的情人

Little Peter Pan

小飛俠

Shaolin Kids...

烏龍小少林

Whatever You Want...

珠光寶氣

Hitting List

終極獵殺

Mermaid Gets Married

人魚傳說

Chong Hong-kin

莊龍建



Yuen Woo-ping shows Jet Lee some moves in *Fist of Legend*



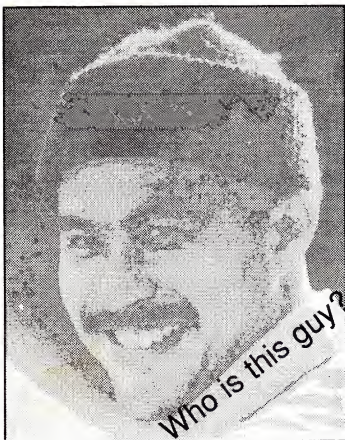
Make Check or Money Order Payable to Hong Kong Film Connection for \$16 (this includes shipping cost). The shirts have a full color back with red text, and the HKFC logo is on the front in red. These shirts are white, Hanes 50 / 50's, and the sizes are M, L, and XL. The official HKFC shirts are really nice, and they're going fast. So don't miss out! A second design will be made later this year-- if you have any ideas let us

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Coming Soon

Can you guess who we will interview next? He has worked with Jet Lee, Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Michelle Yeoh, and Yuen Biao. You'll find out in the next issue of HKFC! Our headlining article will be on veteran action director Yuen Woo-ping. From reviewing all of his films to discussing the origins of the Yuen clan, this article will explain why Yuen is the best. Translated interviews with Jet Lee and Sammo Hung and the latest film reviews and news will round kick this amazing issue!

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